NATION

14-year-old tribal girl gangraped in Odisha

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Markets tank 1% amid foreign fund exodus

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Kohli's form in focus as India eye ODI sweep over England

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SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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15 GERMAN PILOTS MISS AERO SHOW, THANKS TO TRAFFIC

BENGALURU, 11 FEB

Bengaluru's notorious traffic once again caused chaos, as 15 German pilots were stranded for over two hours, missing the inaugural ceremony of Aero India 2025 at Yelahanka Air Force Station. Despite being just 17km from the venue, the pilots found themselves stuck in gridlock after taking the regular route instead of special lanes designated for foreign delegates. The pilots, who had set out early at 8am, reached the venue after the ceremony had concluded. One pilot remarked, "We were stuck for almost one-and-a-half hours at the entry point. Yesterday, we discussed the city's infrastructure, and today, we experienced it first-hand." Officials maintained that traffic management improvements were in place for the event.

—Salar News

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India making its own large language model: PM

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is greeted by President of France Emmanuel Macron as he arrives in Paris **PHOTO: PTI**

PARIS, 11 FEB

India is developing its own large language model in a public-private partnership (PPP) mode, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said at the AI Action Summit in Paris.

The PPP model is used to bring resources together and make them available to start-ups, he said, offering to host the next AI Action summit in India.

He added that AI can help transform millions of lives by improving health, education and agriculture.

Referring to apprehensions about job losses on account of AI, Modi said history has shown that work does not disappear due to technology but its nature changes and new types of jobs are created.

> **I appreciate Modi's point. AI will facilitate and make people more productive. It is not going to replace human beings, it will never replace human beings** -JD Vance, US Vice President

Co-chairing the AI Action Summit along with French President Emmanuel Macron here, Modi said that AI is changing the polity, economy, security and society.

He also made a strong case for collective efforts to establish a global framework for artificial intelligence (AI) based on open source which enhances trust, transparency and is free from biases.

He added that governance is not just about managing risks and rivalries but is also about promoting innovations and deploying them for global good.

"We must democratise technology and create people-centric applications. We must address concerns related to cyber security, disinformation and deep fakes," he said.

He stressed on the need to develop quality data sets free from biases.

He said AI can cut through jargon and summarise medical prescriptions in a language that can be understood easily.

"AI is developing at an unprecedented scale and speed and being adopted and deployed even faster. There is also a deep inter-dependence across borders. We need to invest in skilling and re-skilling our people for an AI-driven future," Modi said.

India, he said, leads in AI adoption and technolegal solutions on data privacy. *—PTI*

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Prez's rule likely in Manipur as BJP fails to pick CM

BJP leaders & Sambit Patra met Guv yet no clarity on CM pick

IMPHAL, 11 FEB

Manipur is set to come under President's Rule following the resignation of Chief Minister N Biren Singh, amid escalating ethnic violence in the region. The violence between the Meitei and Kuki-Zo communities, which has claimed over 250 lives and displaced thousands since May 2023, shows no signs of abating.

Biren Singh stepped down on Sunday after a two-year tenure marked by intensifying unrest.

Despite the resignation, the BJP failed to appoint a new chief minister, prompting officials to indicate that the state would be placed under President's Rule. Sources reveal that a BJP delegation, including party leaders Sambit Patra and A Sharda Devi, met with Manipur Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla to discuss the situation, but no official outcome from the meeting has been disclosed.

Legal experts have warned of a looming constitutional crisis. Senior Supreme Court advocate Arunabh Chowdhury noted that under Article 174 of the Constitution, the state assembly must meet at least once every six months. With the last session concluding in August 2024 and the scheduled session of February 10 cancelled, the state faces a potential constitutional deadlock. Chowdhury argued that President's Rule under Article 356 is the only viable solution, as the assembly is legally required to convene within six months.

Meanwhile, Governor Bhalla has nullified the seventh session of the 12th Manipur Legislative Assembly, which was set to begin on February 10. The move has drawn criticism, with Congress president Keisham Meghachandra calling the cancellation "illegal and unconstitutional." He also expressed concerns that the state's lack of a functioning Assembly could push Manipur into deeper political instability. *—Agencies*

The violence between the Meitei and Kuki-Zo communities, which has claimed over 250 lives and displaced thousands since May 2023, shows no signs of abating **PHOTO: PTI**

Derogatory post on INDIA bloc leaders leaves Mysuru tense

BENGALURU, 11 FEB

North-east Mysuru experienced significant unrest on Monday night as protests erupted outside the Udayagiri police station over a derogatory WhatsApp status targeting a specific community.

Police reports indicate that an individual named Suresh, a resident of Udayagiri, allegedly shared an offensive image on social media featuring political leaders Rahul Gandhi, Akhilesh Yadav, and Arvind Kejriwal in a semi-nude state, along with derogatory remarks about Prophet Muhammad.

The post gained traction, leading to hundreds of Muslims protesting in Udayagiri, Shanthinagar, and Rajivnagar, demanding swift action. The police responded by registering a case and arrested Suresh in the early hours of Tuesday. Tensions escalated when rumours circulated that he might be released, prompting some protesters to become violent.

In the ensuing chaos, demonstrators pelted stones at the police station, causing damage to several vehicles. Law enforcement deployed tear gas and resorted to a lathi-charge to disperse the crowd. Several individuals, including officers, were injured and subsequently hospitalised. Senior police officials, including Additional Director General of Police (Law and Order) R Hitendra and Mysuru Police Commissioner Seema Latkar, arrived at the scene to manage the situation. ADGP Hitendra confirmed that while Suresh was arrested and in custody, violent protests ensued demanding his transfer to the mob. Karnataka's Home Minister G Parameshwara announced that the situation had been brought under control and instructed the police to take stringent actions against both Suresh and those involved in the violent protests, while the BJP accused the government of being overly lenient towards rioters. *—Salar News*

Bombay HC lets Adani cut 209 mangroves

MUMBAI, 11 FEB

Bombay High Court has granted the Adani Group permission to cut 209 mangroves near Vasai creek for a high-voltage transmission line project, citing its importance for public interest. The project, aimed at increasing electricity supply to Mumbai, will help address the city's insufficient transmission capacity, according to the court's order issued on 6 February. The project involves an 80km stretch, with 30 km of overhead lines and 50km of underground cables, passing through Mumbai, Thane, and Palghar districts. Of this, only 1 km runs through mangrove areas. *—Agencies*

NCW summons Allahabadia, Samay Raina

NEW DELHI, 11 FEB

National Commission for Women (NCW) on Tuesday expressed strong concern over the derogatory comment made by YouTuber Ranveer Allahbadia on 'India's Got Latent' and summoned them on 17 February. Meanwhile, Maharashtra's cyber cell unit filed a case against not just the Ranveer but all the people involved from Episode 1 to 6 of 'India's Got Latent' including guests. Sources said altogether, action has been taken against 40-odd people. The panel has taken note of the vulgar made by Allahabadia, Samay Raina, Apoorva, Jaspreet Singh and Ashish Chanchlani. *—PTI*

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India ranks 96th in corruption index ranking

PHOTO: DALL·E 2025

Here is how India fares in corruption survey:

2024:	96th place.
2023:	93rd place.

Total countries surveyed: 180

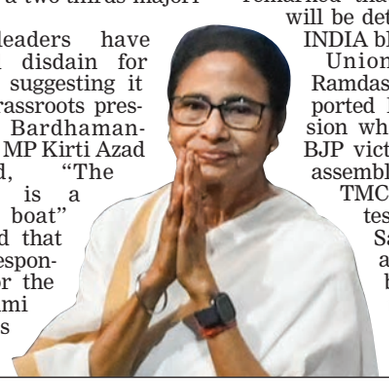
>>>More on Page 6

TMC ditches INDIA to go solo in 2026 WB polls

NEW DELHI, 11 FEB

The Trinamool Congress (TMC) has confirmed it will go solo in the 2026 West Bengal assembly elections, dismissing any collaboration with the Congress or any other parties. Party chief Mamata Banerjee, during a meeting in Kolkata, expressed confidence of achieving a two-thirds majority.

TMC leaders have expressed disdain for Congress, suggesting it lacks a grassroots presence. Bardhaman-Durgapur MP Kirti Azad remarked, "The Congress is a sinking boat" and stated that it bears responsibility for the Aam Aadmi Party's (AAP) defeat in Delhi due to its "backstabbing" of allies.



Echoing similar sentiments, Dum Dum MP Sougata Roy stated that the TMC is strong enough to combat the BJP independently. Conversely, Congress leader Ujjwal Raman Singh acknowledged that all parties have the right to make autonomous decisions, but remarked that future moves will be determined by the INDIA bloc leadership.

Union Minister Ramdas Athawale supported Banerjee's decision while predicting a BJP victory in the next assembly elections. The TMC previously contested the last Lok Sabha elections alone while being part of the INDIA bloc. *—PTI*

State unveils new industrial policy

BENGALURU, 11 FEB

Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar on Tuesday unveiled Karnataka's Industrial Policy 2025-30 at the inaugural event of Invest Karnataka 2025 summit here.

The policy aims to position the State as the top destination for high-technology manufacturing investments in Asia.

Shivakumar said the policy focuses on equitable and sustainable development, targeting Rs 7.5 lakh crore in investments and aiming to generate 20 lakh new jobs during the policy period.

A key objective is to ensure balanced growth across regions by promoting industrial development beyond Bengaluru, particularly in backward areas, he added.

Highlighting the key features of the policy, Large and Medium Industries Minister M B Patil said, "To achieve this objective, the policy classifies districts into three zones. Zone-1 and Zone-2 include industrially backward taluks and districts, which will receive differential incentives to encourage investments."

Folk artistes perform during the Invest Karnataka Summit in Bengaluru Palace on Tuesday **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

Bengaluru Urban and Rural districts fall under Zone-3, which has a different incentive structure to ensure targeted support for industries in less developed areas, Patil explained.

A statement issued by the minister's office said the policy identifies key focus sectors that will drive economic development and job creation across Karnataka. *—PTI*

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SC ASKS EC NOT TO DELETE EVM DATA

NEW DELHI, 11 FEB

The Supreme Court has called for a response from the Election Commission of India (ECI) regarding pleas for the verification of burnt memory and symbol loading units in electronic voting machines (EVMs), following its judgment last April. A special bench, consisting of Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justice Dipankar Datta, instructed the poll panel to refrain from erasing or reloading data during the verification process.

The bench requested the ECI to file a response within 15 days, outlining its procedures, and adjourned the matter until the week beginning 3 March. Expressing frustration over the withdrawal of a similar petition, the bench declined to consider a fresh application from former Haryana minister Karan Singh Dalal for EVM verification policies.

The court previously rejected calls to revert to paper ballots, affirming the security offered by EVMs against malpractice. It permitted unsuccessful candidates to request verification of micro-controller chips in 5 per cent of EVMs per assembly constituency, accompanied by a fee.

Concerns were raised about the ECI's verification costs, with the bench deeming the Rs 40,000 fee excessive. *—PTI*

CHANGES VISA POLICY

Saudi bans minors from Hajj, prioritises 1st timers

NEW DELHI, 11 FEB

Saudi Arabia has announced a ban on children accompanying pilgrims for the 2025 Hajj season, citing concerns over overcrowding and safety.

The Ministry of Hajj and Umrah explained that this decision was made to protect children from the dangers posed by large crowds during the pilgrimage, which sees millions of worshippers annually.

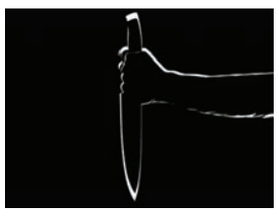
In addition, Saudi authorities revealed that first-time pilgrims would be prioritised for the 2025 Hajj, ensuring more Muslims have the opportunity to perform the sacred journey at least once in their lifetime.

Domestic pilgrims can now apply for Hajj via the Nusuk app or official website. New regulations require applicants to verify their details and register their travel companions. A new installment-based payment option has also been introduced for domestic pilgrims. The Hajj packages can now be paid for in three installments, with a 20 per cent deposit due within 72 hours of reservation, followed by two equal payments in Ramadan and Shawwal.

- Saudi Arabia has also amended its visa policies, limiting travellers from 14 countries, including India, to single-entry visas.

Saudi Arabia has also amended its visa policies, limiting travellers from 14 countries, including India, to single-entry visas. This change, effective from 1 February, 2025, aims to prevent the misuse of multiple-entry visas for unauthorised Hajj participation.

To further enhance safety, the ministry has introduced measures such as safety information campaigns, modern intelligent systems for coordinating pilgrim movement, and improvements to infrastructure, including updated tent camps and walking routes. These steps are part of the government's ongoing efforts to improve the overall experience and safety of pilgrims. *—Agencies*



Cops form teams to nab rowdy who stabbed 4 in City

BENGALURU, 11 FEB

The City Police Commissioner, B Dayananda, announced on Tuesday that four special teams have been formed to apprehend the absconding assailant involved in a series of stabbing incidents in Indiranagar. The suspect, identified as Kadamba, a history-sheeter, is believed to have fled to Hoskote. Dayananda assured the public that efforts are underway to capture Kadamba, under the direction of the Deputy Commissioner of Police for East Division. The incident occurred on Saturday night when Kadamba, reportedly intoxicated, had an argument with his parents and went on a violent rampage in Indiranagar. During the attack, Kadamba injured at least five people, including a pani puri vendor, three pedestrians, a biker, and a security guard. *—Salar News*

3 killed as bullock carts run over them in Haveri

HAVERI, 11 FEB

Three students from the Agriculture University in Hanamanahatti, Ranebennur taluk, were killed on the spot when they were run over by bullock carts near Guduguru cross at around 8.30 am on Tuesday. The deceased are Shashikumar Uppar, 25, from Kanavalli (Ranebennur taluk), Aakash Biradar, 23, from Gidihal (Indi taluk, Vijayapura), and Darshan, 23, from Bojan village (Bidar). According to police, the trio was riding a motorcycle when they collided with a bullock cart from behind, causing them to fall onto the road. They were then run over by several bullock carts following the one they had collided with. Police said villagers were en route to the annual Mailar Jatra (fair) and typically travel in bullock carts that move in a procession each year. *—Salar News*

Villagers protest after labourer killed in clash

KALABURAGI, 11 FEB

Hundreds of villagers and community leaders on Tuesday staged a protest in front of the DSP office, demanding the arrest of the accused after a youth was killed in a clash over work under Chincholi police station area. The protesters also demanded that the government provide protection and Rs 50 lakh compensation to the family of the deceased. Police said an altercation took place between Ravikumar, 26, a resident of Shale Beeranahalli, and Madhusudhan Reddy of Salebiranahalli over unloading stone pallets from a truck. In the heat of the argument, Reddy kicked Bovi in the chest and the latter fell unconscious. Ravikumar, who worked as a daily wage labourer, later succumbed to his injuries. His wife has filed a complaint at Chincholi police station. The villagers' protest was led by Gram Panchayat member Sanju Kumar, along with community leaders Gangadhar and Manik Rao. *—Salar News*

10 foreigners held for drug peddling in City

BENGALURU, 11 FEB

The Central Crime Branch (CCB) anti-narcotics wing arrested 10 foreign nationals on charges of drug peddling and illegal stay across various City locations, the police reported on Tuesday. The operation, coordinated with local police, led to the seizure of banned substances worth Rs 8 lakh, including 55g of MDMA and 3kg of ganja, from an accused apprehended in Hennur. In separate raids across Chikkajala, Amruthahalli, and Vidyaranyapura, several foreign nationals were arrested for overstaying and handed over to the Foreigners Regional Registration Office (FRRO). *—Salar News*

382 govt workers died by suicide in 2 years

Bengaluru records highest number of cases

BENGALURU, 11 FEB

Data from the State Crime Records Bureau (SCRB), obtained through an RTI by the Mysuru-based NGO Odanadi Seva Samsthe, reveals that at least 382 government employees in State took their own lives between 2021 and 2023.

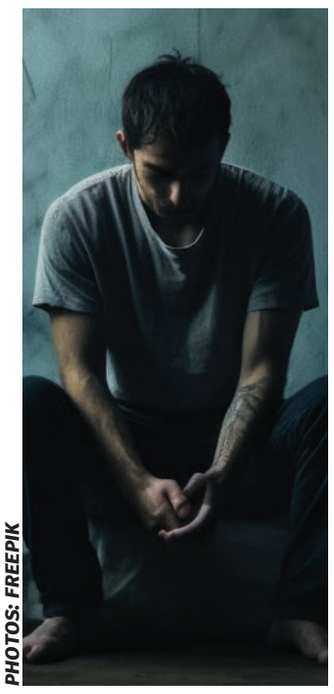
Among them, 54 were police personnel. Bengaluru recorded the highest number of suicides across both categories.

The data shows that Bengaluru, Mysuru, Belagavi, and Hubballi-Dharwad each reported 16 suicides, while Gadag, Kalaburagi, Hassan, Tumakuru, and the Karnataka Railway Division had 12 cases each. Other districts such as Bagalkot and Uttara Kannada reported 11 suicides, while Bengaluru Urban and Udupi saw 10. The figures for most other districts were in single digits.

Although suicides decreased slightly in 2022, the number rose again in 2023, surpassing 2021 levels, highlighting a troubling trend. Among police officers, Bengaluru once again topped the list with 13 suicides over the three years. Mysuru, Chamarajanagar, and other districts followed with smaller numbers.

ML Parashuram, Director of Odanadi Seva Samsthe, **told Salar News** that several factors contribute to the crisis, including excessive workload, humiliation by senior officials, lack of autonomy, forced involvement in corruption, and difficulties in obtaining emergency leave. Personal issues, such as alcoholism and family disputes, were also noted.

Parashuram stressed that most of the suicides involved lower-level staff, such as clerks and accountants. He called for empathetic investigations into these cases and urged reforms to provide better mental health support and address workplace challenges within the government sector. *—Salar News*



PHOTOS: FREEPIK

- Although suicides decreased slightly in 2022, the number rose again in 2023, surpassing 2021 levels, highlighting a troubling

REGION WITH MOST CASES

Districts	Cases
Bengaluru	16
Mysuru	16
Belagavi	16
Hubballi-Dharwad	16
Gadag	12
Kalaburagi	12
Hassan	12
Tumakuru	12
Karnataka Railway Division	12
Bagalkot	11
Uttara Kannada	11
Bengaluru Urban	10
Udupi	10

	Government officials	Police officers
2021	115	17
2022	96	13
2023	117	24

Delegates, visitors, and others at the exhibition halls on the second day of Aero India 2025 at Yelahanka Air Force Station in Bengaluru on Tuesday *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

Adani Defence, DRDO unveil vehicle-mounted drone system

BENGALURU, 11 FEB

Adani Defence and Aerospace (ADA), in collaboration with state-run Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), unveiled India's Vehicle-Mounted Counter-Drone System at the Aero India on Tuesday.

DRDO Director General (Electronics & Communication System) Dr BK Das launched the platform in the presence of defence experts and industry partners.

With the increasing use of drones in modern warfare for both reconnaissance and offensive operations, the need for a robust anti-drone mechanism had become imperative, the company said.

"The Vehicle-Mounted Counter-Drone System ensures long-range protection, agility and precision, making it a formidable asset for modern defence forces," it said.

GE Aerospace, IAF sign contract

The GE Aerospace on Tuesday announced that it has signed a five-year performance-based logistics contract with the Indian Air Force to provide a comprehensive sustainment solution for the T700-GE-701D engines powering the latter's fleet of AH-64E-I Apache helicopters.

Under this contract, GE Aerospace will be responsible for the maintenance, repair and overhaul of the T700 engines and flight line parts to ensure engine availability for the Indian Air Force, the company said.

BEML, STX Engine forge partnership

Defence PSU BEML Limited on Tuesday said it has signed a strategic partnership with South Korea-based firm STX Engine to co-develop, manufacture and market Battle Tank engines, marine engines, spares and engine aggregates.

The agreement also includes servicing and maintenance of engine components to cater to Indian defence needs while exploring export opportunities to friendly nations, the public sector undertaking said. Meanwhile Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said, "It is my firm belief that the evolving global security scenario demands innovative approaches and stronger partnerships. India's engagements in the global stage exemplifies our commitment to fostering security and growth for all." *—PTI*

The US F-35 takes off at Aero India 2025 at Yelahanka Air Force Station in Bengaluru on Tuesday *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

'India rolls out red carpet, not red tape'

BENGALURU, 11 FEB

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Tuesday said India rolls out red carpet, and not red tape to investors and that there is broad consensus for sustainable economic development in the country.

Inaugurating Invest Karnataka-2025 meet here on Tuesday, he said India has addressed the crucial point of policy uncertainty by creating a stable and predictable policy environment.

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Deputy DK Shivakumar were among those present on the occasion.

The three-day global investors' meet aimed at highlighting the southern state's strategic advantages in fostering innovation, industrial development and global partnerships will officially kickstart on 12 February, following Tuesday's grand inaugural.

With the theme "Reimagining Growth", it expects investment proposals worth Rs 10 lakh crore, with a target of realising at least 70 per cent of these commitments.

Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi and Congress President and Leader of Opposition in Rajya Sabha Mallikarjun Kharge will not take part in the investors meet, due to their preoccupation with the ongoing Parliament session.

Featuring more than 75 marquee speakers, over 25 technical sessions, more than 10 country sessions, and SME Connect discussions, the state's flagship Global Investors Meet (GIM) will provide deep insights into global economic trends.

Mahindra Group Chairman Anand Mahindra announced that the group plans to invest nearly Rs 40,000 crore in Karnataka. He said the Mahindra Group has no hesitation in investing in long-term businesses such as renewable energy, aerospace, hospitality, and real estate in Karnataka. *—PTI*

CM Siddaramaiah with Defence Minister Rajnath Singh at the inaugural of Invest Karnataka in Bengaluru on Tuesday *PHOTO: MOAHMMED ASAD*

Take care of your legs: Rajnath to CM

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Tuesday advised Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, who is recovering from a knee injury, to keep his legs safe from the "stumbling blocks everywhere". In a speech laced with satire at the inaugural session of the Invest Karnataka-2025 summit, Singh said Siddaramaiah will cross all the hurdles. "In politics keeping your legs safe is very important and you have to be very mindful because you will find stumbling blocks everywhere," the Defence minister quipped, sparking peels of laughter from the audience gathered at the venue. Siddaramaiah too received the remark with a smile. Singh was optimistic that Siddaramaiah would overcome all the hurdles. The CM was hospitalised after he developed knee pain on Saturday.

K'taka student among 14 to score 100 in JEE Main

BENGALURU, 11 FEB

National Testing Agency (NTA) announced the results of the Joint Entrance Examination (JEE) Main 2025 Session 1 on Tuesday. Fourteen candidates achieved a perfect 100 percentile score, with Ayush Singhal from Rajasthan topping the list. He was followed by Kushagra Gupta from Karnataka and Daksh from Delhi-NCT.

Candidates can view their scorecards on the official JEE Main website at jeemain.nta.nic.in.

However, the NTA has withheld the results of 39 candidates who were found guilty of using unfair means. Only the top 2.5 lakh candidates from JEE Main have qualified for JEE Advanced, the next step towards admission into the prestigious Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs). Applications for JEE Advanced are now open.

JEE (Main)
Joint Entrance Examination

This year, 13,11,544 candidates registered for Paper 1 (BE/BTech), with 8,67,920 male and 4,43,622 female candidates. The highest number of registrations came from the OBC category, followed by General, EWS, SC, and ST categories. Two candidates identified as Third Gender.

The JEE Main 2025 Session 1 exam was conducted from January 22 to 30.

The NTA also released the final answer keys, dropping 12 questions and awarding full marks to all candidates for them. *—Salar News*

FOCUS ON SCHOOLS

Kalyana K'taka preps ₹4,500 cr development plan

KALABURAGI, 11 FEB

With the government allocating Rs 4,500 crore for the region in the budget, the Kalyana Karnataka Region Development Board (KKRDB) has prepared an action plan to ensure that the amount is completely spent.

Dr Ajay Singh, the chairman of the KKRDB, said that within a month, a Special Component Plan (SCP) and Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP) will be prepared.

Addressing the media at the KKRDB office in Kalaburagi, he said that despite a staff shortage, the board has managed to prepare action plans with support from various departments. He hoped the upcoming budget would allocate an additional Rs 5,000 crore for the board.

Singh said the board is planning to establish 200 Karnataka Public Schools in the region with support from CSR funds and the education department, an announcement of which is expected in the upcoming budget. Each legislative constituency will get four or five of these schools, each built for Rs 5 crore, he said.

The chairman also said the board is planning to set up a committee of experts to improve the healthcare sector in the region Singh said.

A recent Cabinet meeting approved Rs 857 crore for development projects in Kalaburagi. This includes Rs 439 crore for the construction and renovation of primary health centres, community health centres and urban health sub-centres, as well as the procurement of ambulances, the official said. *—Salar News*

Ajay Singh chairs meeting of KKRDB on Tuesday *PHOTO: SALAR*

DIGANTARA GOES GLOBAL

City start-up to build spacecraft in Colorado

NEW DELHI, 11 FEB

Ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the US, Bengaluru-based space start-up Digantara on Tuesday announced the opening of its operations in Colorado where it plans to build spacecraft.

Digantara has invested USD 1M and plans to add another USD 10–15M over the next six to eight months as it plans to serve clients that include US Department of Defense (DoD) agencies, such as the United States Air Force and Space Force.

- Digantara has invested USD 1M and plans to add another USD 10–15M over the next six to eight months as it plans to serve clients that include US Department of Defense .

Colorado Governor Jared Polis has reaffirmed the state's commitment to fostering innovation and strengthening ties with India's rapidly growing space industry.

"Our expansion into the US reinforces our commitment to advancing space surveillance and intelligence globally. As space threats evolve, so must our investments in resilient technologies, positioning us to support mission-critical defense and intelligence operations" Anirudh Sharma, co-founder and CEO of Digantara, said. Modi will be in the United States on 13 and 14 February.

Digantara's expansion into the US comes as a direct outcome of key India–US strategic initiatives, including the Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology and the INDUS-X framework, in which the start-up has been actively engaged since inception. Digantara's Colorado operations include a dedicated facility for spacecraft manufacturing and space optics production which will play a critical role in supporting the Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance needs in the US. *—PTI*

Digantara's expansion into the US comes as a direct outcome of key India–US strategic initiatives *PHOTO: X*

Army captain among 2 killed in IED blast in Jammu

JAMMU, 11 FEB

Two Army personnel, including a captain, were killed and another was injured when suspected terrorists set off an improvised explosive device (IED) near the Line of Control (LoC) in the Akhnoor sector near here on Tuesday, officials said. This was the third incident of cross-border action by terrorists in the Jammu region in four days. It came a day after the general officer commanding of the Jammu-based White Knight Corps unit of the Army, Lieutenant General Navin Sachdeva, reviewed "hostile activities" along the LoC in Rajouri district. The Army confirmed the fatalities in the blast and said "own troops are dominating the area and search operations are underway". *—PTI*

Have 'mercy' on film industry: Jaya Bachchan to FM

NEW DELHI, 11 FEB

Samajwadi Party member Jaya Bachchan on Tuesday urged Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman to have "mercy" on the film industry and come up with some proposals to help it survive. Speaking during the General Discussion on the Union Budget 2025-26 in the Rajya Sabha, the actor-politician accused the government of trying to "kill" the film industry, saying that the survival of daily wage workers has become difficult and single-screen theatres were shutting down as people were not going to movie halls as everything has become so costly. She appealed for some "mercy" for the country's audio-visual industry and alleged that cinema was being targeted. *—PTI*

Assam CM meets Singapore Prez, talks on ties

GUWAHATI, 11 FEB

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has met with Singapore's President Tharman Shanmugaratnam during a two-day visit to Singapore, discussing the state's role in enhancing India-Singapore relations. The talks focused on collaborative projects, particularly the forthcoming Advantage Assam 2.0 investment summit. Sarma expressed gratitude for Singapore's involvement in partnerships across sectors like semiconductors, green energy, and advanced technology. Sarma also engaged with Singaporean Foreign Affairs Minister Vivian Balakrishnan, aiming to bolster ties under India's Act East Policy. Furthermore, discussions with semiconductor industry leaders centred on collaborations for Assam's upcoming Electronic City in Jagiroad, while a meeting with Surbana Jurong's officials reviewed ongoing projects aimed at enhancing urban planning in Assam. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

12 Kumbh devotees killed in separate road accidents

PRAYAGRAJ, 11 FEB

Three devotees on their way to attend the Maha Kumbh died after being hit by a vehicle near Nagnathpur National Highway here on Tuesday, police said. Utraon SHO Pankaj Kumar Tripathi said Jagori Mahato, 45, Kunti Mahato, 70, and Alpana Mahato, 47, among other devotees were travelling in a bus. In another incident, nine persons returning from Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj were killed and seven others injured in two road accidents in Madhya Pradesh's Jabalpur and Maihar districts on Tuesday morning, officials said. MP Chief Minister Mohan Yadav expressed grief and appealed to the people not to exert themselves beyond a point while travelling to such places. In Maihar, two were killed and five others injured when an unidentified vehicle hit their SUV in Kanchanpur village. *—PTI*

Kejriwal holds meeting amid 'dissent' in Punjab

BJP leaders claim that Kejriwal wants to replace Mann as CM

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann with AAP's State chief Aman Arora talks to the media after a meeting with party national convenor Arvind Kejriwal at the Kapurthala House, in New Delhi, on Tuesday *PHOTO: PTI*

NEW DELHI, 11 FEB

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Tuesday dismissed speculation about dissent within AAP's state unit, asserting that Congress leaders have a history of party-switching while AAP leaders remain dedicated.

"Switching sides is Congress' culture; they talk about others but do not worry about themselves. I will ask Pratap Singh Bajwa how many MLAs they have in Delhi." Mann said.

"Bajwa has made such claims for years, let him say it...," he added.

Mann's remarks came after Punjab Congress leader Partap Singh Bajwa claimed that over 30 AAP MLAs were in touch with his party.

"Bajwa has been saying this. He should not count our MLAs and instead, see how many MLAs Congress has in Delhi."

Mann was speaking to reporters after AAP national convenor Arvind Kejriwal held a meeting with Punjab ministers and MLAs at Kapurthala House in Delhi.

The meeting followed AAP's defeat in the Delhi Assembly elections, sparking speculation about instability in its Punjab unit.

Highlighting his government's achievements, Mann said, "Our party's national convenor Arvind Kejriwal has wholeheartedly thanked everyone for the tireless hard work done by the MLAs of Punjab in campaigning in the Delhi elections. Because of the work we have done, we are still getting the love of the people of Delhi. We will continue to work for public welfare in the future also."

Meanwhile, the BJP has also intensified its attack on the AAP. *—PTI*

Sibal: Cong seeks unity, INDIA bloc needs strategy

NEW DELHI, 11 FEB

Asserting that the Congress always tries to get everyone on board with a consensus, Rajya Sabha MP Kapil Sibal on Tuesday stressed the need for the INDIA bloc parties to sit together to decide on how they will contest elections going forward, and remove "confusion".

Addressing a press conference here, Sibal said questions should also have been asked of AAP convenor Arvind Kejriwal when he fielded candidates in Haryana, Goa, Gujarat and other places against the Congress.

"Everyone will have to decide how they will approach the elections. The BJP's advantage is that they have a single command, and they get benefit of that. In Uttar Pradesh, the Congress fought the elections with the Samajwadi Party, and it helped. The same happened in Tamil Nadu. So, they need to discuss among themselves on how they should move forward," the former Congress leader said. *—PTI*

ASSEMBLY SESSION 2025

Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan *PHOTO: PTI*

Kerala Cabinet gives nod to draft bill for pvt varsities

T'PURAM, 11 FEB

The Kerala Left government has initiated significant legislative changes, approving a draft bill for establishing private universities in the state.

The Kerala State Private Universities (Establishment and Regulation) Draft Bill, 2025, mandates that only credible agencies can apply to establish such universities, which must adhere to UGC guidelines regarding faculty appointments and administration.

The bill reserves 40 per cent of seats for Kerala students and ensures ongoing scholarships for Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST).

In parallel, Kerala's government firmly opposes the Centre's proposed deep-sea mining along the state's coast. Fisheries Minister Saji Cheriyan asserted that this initiative threatens the livelihoods of local fishermen and the marine ecosystem. He urged unity from the opposition Congress-led UDF against the mining plans, which he believes will lead to job losses and coastal erosion.

Additionally, the state is grappling with increasing human-wildlife conflict. Forest Minister AK Saseendran outlined ongoing efforts to prevent animals from encroaching on human areas. *—PTI*

> **A necessary move in accordance with the times**
> -R Bindu, Kerala Higher Education

DMK objects to Sanskrit translation, Speaker retorts

NEW DELHI, 11 FEB

DMK MP Dayanidhi Maran on Tuesday alleged that taxpayers' money was being wasted by providing simultaneous interpretation of Lok Sabha proceedings in Sanskrit due to RSS ideology, prompting Speaker Om Birla to hit back saying Sanskrit has been the primary language of India.

A visibly upset Birla said simultaneous interpretation of House proceedings was not limited to Sanskrit alone but other recognised languages too.

"Simultaneous interpretation will be available in Hindi and Sanskrit," Birla said.

Soon after the Question Hour concluded, Birla said he was happy to announce that six more languages -- Bodo, Dogri, Maithili, Manipuri, Sanskrit and Urdu -- have been included in the list of languages in which simultaneous interpretation was available for members.

He said besides English and Hindi, simultaneous interpretation is available in Assamese, Bangla, Gujarati, Kannada, Malyali, Marathi, Odiya, Punjabi, Tamil and Telugu.

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla and DMK MP Dayanidhi Maran during the Lok Sabha Assembly session, on Tuesday *PHOTO: ANI*

When Birla made the announcement, DMK members started raising slogans prompting the Speaker to ask Maran what his "problem" was. Birla hit back, asking the DMK member which country he was residing in.

"This is Bharat and its primary language has been Sanskrit. I said 22 languages, not Sanskrit alone. Why do you object to Sanskrit. There are 22 recognised languages in Parliament. Simultaneous interpretation will take place in Hindi as well as Sanskrit," he asserted. *—PTI*

> **Why no numbers of those died in Kumbh stampede despite digitisation claims**
> -Akhilesh Yadav, Samajwadi Party Chief

Constitution must prevail, violations serious: Dhankhar

NEW DELHI, 11 FEB

In a heated session of the Rajya Sabha on 11 February, Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar emphasised the importance of the original Indian Constitution, which includes 22 illustrations.

The discussion was prompted by BJP MP Radha Mohan Das Agrawal's assertion that these crucial illustrations have been omitted from most copies available in India. Dhankhar insisted that any deviation from the Constitution as originally signed by the framers is unacceptable, urging the government to uphold the authentic version.

Congress leader Mallikarjun Kharge accused the BJP of creating unnecessary controversy around Dr. BR Ambedkar's legacy. *—PTI*

OUT ON PAROLE, ENGINEER RASHID BRINGS UP CIVILIAN DEATHS IN J&K

Lok Sabha member Sheikh Abdul Rashid, who is out on parole, on Tuesday demanded a "full investigation" into the recent death of two civilians in Jammu and Kashmir. Raising the issue during Zero Hour, Rashid, also known as Engineer Rashid, an independent member from Baramulla claimed that two persons Wasim Ahmad Mir and Makhan Din were killed "allegedly by forces" and demanded a full investigation into the matter. *—PTI*

TMC'S MOITRA FLAYS UGC DRAFT RULES AS ANTI-CONSTITUTIONAL

TMC MP Mahua Moitra has condemned the draft UGC regulations for vice-chancellor appointments in universities as "anti-constitutional" and "anti-federal". During Zero Hour, she highlighted the absence of state representatives in the selection committee, despite states fully funding their universities. The proposed regulations allow industry experts to be eligible for vice-chancellor roles and relax hiring standards for faculty. Meanwhile, concerns were raised regarding offshore sand mining in Kerala. *—PTI*

Telangana hikes beer price by 15%

HYDERABAD, 11 FEB

In a significant development, the Telangana government has approved a 15 per cent increase in beer prices, following a request from the Brewers Association of India (BAI).

This decision comes on the heels of a temporary suspension of beer supplies by United Breweries Ltd (UBL), attributed to the company's unchanged pricing since the 2019-20 fiscal year, which resulted in substantial losses. UBL had also raised concerns regarding unpaid dues from the Telangana Beverages Corporation Ltd (TGBCL).

Despite the challenges, UBL has resumed supplies. The BAI welcomed the government's decision, noting it indicates recognition of industry concerns regarding business viability in the state. Vinod Giri, the Director General of BAI, expressed confidence in Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy's leadership. *—PTI*

India has many possibilities in energy sector: PM

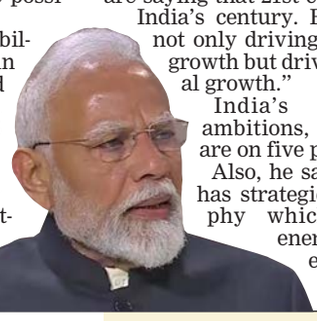
NEW DELHI, 11 FEB

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday urged investors to invest in India's energy sector, saying the country offers many possibilities in view of its renewable energy goals in the next five years.

Referring to the target of having 500 GW of renewable energy, 5 million green hydrogen output by 2030 as well as the launch of fresh bidding rounds for oil and gas assets, the prime minister said "there are possibilities of new investments and I hope that you explore possibilities in India".

"There are many possibilities of investment in these sector," Modi said addressing the India Energy Week 2025 (IEW'25) virtually.

"You are not just a part of India energy week, you are an important part of India's energy ambitions," Modi told investors.



He further said, "All experts are saying that 21st century is India's century. Bharat is not only driving it's own growth but driving global growth."

India's energy ambitions, he said, are on five pillars.

Also, he said, India has strategic geography which make energy trade easier and more attractive.

Besides, India is committed for global sustainability and this is aiding new possibilities in India's energy sector, the prime minister added.

]India is the first country among G20 nations to meet its carbon emission cut target set by the Paris global climate.

Meanwhile, Modi will inaugurate the Invest Madhya Pradesh- Global Investors Summit (GIS) in Bhopal on 24 February. *—PTI*

AHEAD OF MAGHI PURNIMA

Prayagraj to turn into 'no vehicle zone'

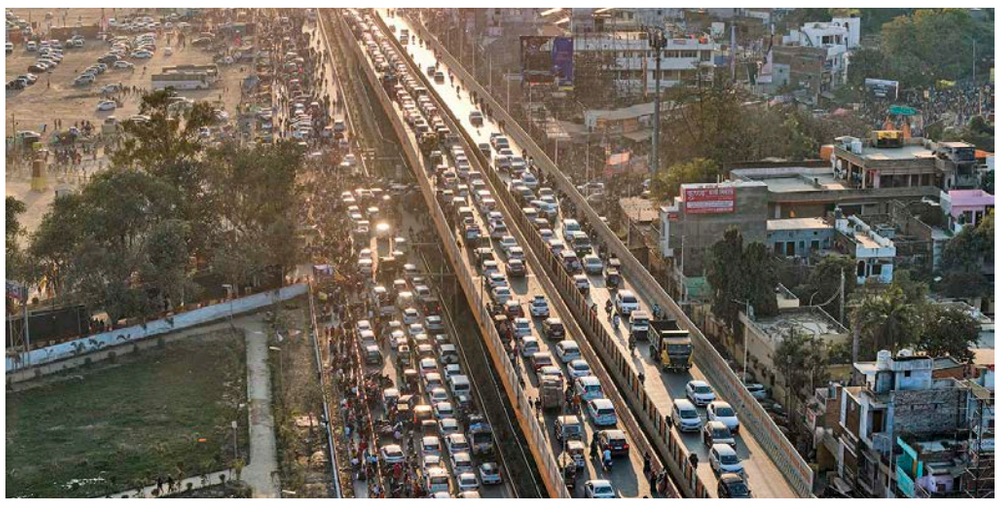
MAHAKUMBH NAGAR, 11 FEB

The Prayagraj administration has chalked out a special traffic plan for Maghi Purnima on Wednesday when the month-long 'kalpvas', an integral tradition of the Maha Kumbh, comes to an end.

Kalpvas refers to the practice of living near a sacred river for a set period, adhering to fasting, self-discipline, introspection and spiritual purification. Performing kalpvas during the Maha Kumbh is considered auspicious.

More than 10 lakh devotees have undertaken kalpavas at the Triveni Sangam this year, a government statement said.

While the fair area has been declared a 'no vehicle zone' from 4 am on Tuesday, the rule will apply to the entire city from 5 pm onwards, with an exemption for emergency and essential services, an official statement said.



Vehicles stuck on the Sohabatiya Bagh flyover during the Mahakumbh Mela, in Prayagraj. Vehicles were reportedly stuck in traffic for more than 48 hours as the jam stretched over 300 km *PHOTO: PTI*

The measures are meant to ensure the safety of the devotees who are expected to take a dip in the Sangam in large numbers.

To ensure the safe evacuation of the devotees from the Mela area in case of any emergency, the special traffic plan will remain in place till the completion of ritual. *—PTI*

45 CR DEVOTEES TOOK DIP: YOGI RUBBISHES 'VIP BATHING' JAB

LUCKNOW, 11 FEB

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Tuesday said that some people are trying to spread confusion by linking the Maha Kumbh to VIP bathing, but the truth is that it is a confluence of harmony and faith where devotees join hands by removing the barriers of caste, religion, language and region. Addressing an event to mark the 57th death anniversary of Deendayal Upadhyay, Adityanath said, "Who are these people spreading negativity? These are the same people who took VVIP treatment from the government throughout their lives and tried to pave a path for their future generations. These are people who stand against India and Sanatan Dharma by creating negativity and spreading false propaganda." The chief minister's remarks came amid opposition leaders accusing of "mismanagement" and "VIP culture" after at least 30 devotees were killed in a pre-dawn stampede. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

Two detained for pelting stones at train in Bihar

SAMASTIPUR, 11 FEB

Two persons have been detained at Bihar's Madhubani railway station for pelting stones at the Delhi-bound Swatantrata Senani Express train on Monday night, as large crowds gathered to board trains for the Maha Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh. With general and sleeper class coaches fully booked, some passengers attempted to breach a locked air-conditioned coach, leading to frustration among those waiting outside. In response, the crowd hurled stones and banged on the train's windows, causing damage. The Railway Protection Force intervened, restoring order. Upon arrival at Samastipur station, complaints were raised, and the two accused were taken into custody, officials said. *—PTI*

14-year-old tribal girl gang-raped in Odisha

All four accused youths have been arrested

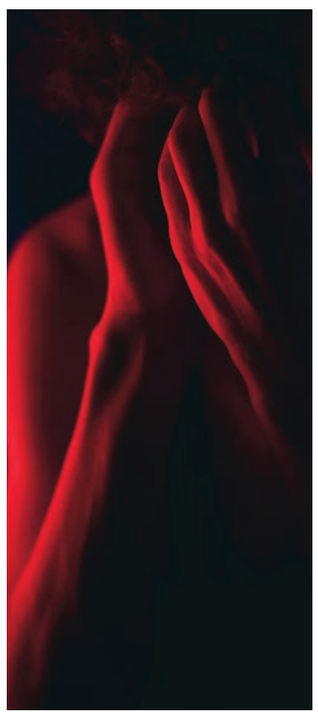


PHOTO: FREEPIK

KORAPUT, 11 FEB

A 14-year-old tribal girl was allegedly raped by four youths in Odisha's Koraput district, police officials said on Tuesday.

The incident took place on Saturday night when the girl visited a Jatra or village theatre with her friends.

As the girl came out of the venue to relieve herself, the four accused abducted her and took her to a nearby hillock, where they took turns to rape her, a police officer said.

The girl's father said she returned home when the accused fled after committing the crime and shared her ordeal with her parents.

The girl's family has registered an FIR at the Laxmipur police station on Monday and the four accused were picked up from Kashipur police station area in neighbouring Rayagada district, the police officer said.

Laxmipur inspector in-charge Sugyani Sahu said that the four persons were later put under arrest on Tuesday following interrogation. "The survivor has been medically examined at Koraput district headquarters hospital," the officer added.

- The incident took place when the girl visited a village theatre. As the girl came out of the venue, the four accused abducted her, took her to a nearby hillock and took turns to rape her

A team headed by Koraput Superintendent of Police Rohit Varma is probing the matter.

The incident came to light amid the visit of National Commission for Women chairperson Vijaya Kishore Rahatkar to Odisha, where she was to conduct a Mahila Jan Sunwai (public hearing) in Bhubaneswar during the day. *—PTI*

SC: Lottery distributors not liable for service tax

NEW DELHI, 11 FEB

Lottery distributors are not liable to pay service tax to the Union government, the Supreme Court held on Tuesday while dismissing an appeal of the Centre on the issue.

A bench comprising Justices BV Nagarathna and NK Singh did not agree to the appeal of the Centre against the Sikkim High Court judgement.

"Service tax is not leviable on the transactions between the purchaser of the lottery tickets and firm...In view of the aforesaid discussions, we find no merit in the appeals filed by the Union of India and others. Hence, these appeals are dismissed," the bench said.

Upholding the Sikkim High Court verdict, the top court said it is only the state government that can impose taxes on lotteries and not the Centre.

The Centre had contended that it was entitled to impose service tax.

The top court said the high court was right in holding that the lottery comes within the expression "betting and gambling" which is part of Entry 62 of the state list of the Constitution and only the state can impose the tax.

The Centre had moved the top court in 2013. The high court judgement had come on a plea filed by lottery firm Future Gaming Solutions Pvt Ltd. *—PTI*

Can't handle mob lynching cases from Delhi: SC

NEW DELHI, 11 FEB

The apex court on Tuesday said it was not feasible to micro-manage cases of mob lynching from Delhi and disposed of a plea raising related concerns, particularly cow vigilantism against Muslims.

A bench of Justices BR Gavai and K Vinod Chandran referred to the apex court's 2018 verdict which passed a slew of directions to provide "preventive, remedial and punitive measures" to deal with offences like mob violence and cow vigilantism. It said the authorities were bound to follow the directions. If there was any non-compliance, there was remedy available for the aggrieved person and could approach competent courts, it said. *—PTI*

Panel condemns 'racist' remarks against Darang

ITANAGAR, 11 FEB

Arunachal Pradesh State Commission for Women (APSCW) has condemned "derogatory and racist" remarks made by social media influencer Elvish Yadav against former Miss Arunachal and Big Boss contestant Chum Darang. In a letter to the National Commission for Women, APSCW chairperson Kenjum Pakam on Monday said that the remarks were not only an insult to Darang but also to women across Northeast India. Yadav, in a podcast with Big Boss 18 contestant Rajat Dalal, had made fun of Darang, saying in HIndi, "Karan Veer must have suffered from Covid, otherwise who would like Chum? Who has such bad taste? And there is vulgarity in the name of Chum. Her name is Chum and she has worked in 'Gangubai Kathiawadi' movie." *—PTI*

2 schoolgirls jump off bus to escape harassment; 4 held

DAMOH, 11 FEB

Two Class 9 girls jumped out of a moving bus after its driver, conductor and two other persons allegedly made obscene comments, stared at them and refused to stop the vehicle in Madhya Pradesh's Damoh district, police said. The girls were injured in the incident, which took place on Monday morning, and were admitted to the district hospital, they said. The bus driver, conductor and the two other accused were later arrested. "The two girls got suspicious as the accused, besides staring at them, also shut the rear door of the vehicle. Fearing for their safety, they jumped out of the moving bus," Deputy Superintendent of Police Bhawana Dangi said. *—PTI*

Drones banned at J&K's Doda for two months

JAMMU, 11 FEB

A ban on the storage, use, and transportation of drones has been enforced in Doda district, Jammu and Kashmir, for two months to prevent potential misuse by anti-national elements. Police and security agencies are exempt from this prohibition. Government departments intending to utilise drones for activities like mapping, surveys and agricultural monitoring must obtain prior permission. Others in possession of drones must deposit them at the nearest police station within a week. Additional District Magistrate Sudershan Kumar highlighted the need for these measures to safeguard against threats to vital installations and populated areas, following recent incidents involving drones. The implementation of the order will be overseen by the senior superintendent of police, Doda. *—PTI*

MISMANAGEMENT AT RG KAR

Corruption dampens public confidence on state, says Cal HC

KOLKATA, 11 FEB

The Calcutta High Court heard an appeal by Sandip Ghosh, former principal of RG Kar Medical College, seeking a postponement of charge framing in a financial irregularities case. The division bench, led by Justice Joymalya Bagchi, emphasised the detrimental impact of corruption on public confidence in state affairs.

Justice Bagchi declared that the special court handling the case may set a hearing date before the next High Court session. Ghosh, along with four others, was arrested by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) regarding alleged financial misconduct during Ghosh's leadership at the institution.

The bench acknowledged the gravity of the allegations, noting that the accused are currently in judicial remand. "Corruption in high places has serious impact on public confidence in the affairs of the state," it stated, highlighting the need for timely trials.

"A prompt trial of individuals accused of corruption would reinforce public faith in the justice delivery system," the court asserted. At the same time, it recognised the rights of those in custody to a fair and swift trial, labelling this as indispensable for justice administration.

During the session, the CBI submitted a report and committed to providing electronic or scanned copies of relevant documents to the accused by Wednesday. The bench permitted the accused to verify these documents and request the CBI to present a report to the trial judge. *—PTI*

GBS toll hits 7 in Pune, 167 cases confirmed

PUNE, 11 FEB

A 37-year-old driver diagnosed with Guillain-Barre Syndrome (GBS) has succumbed to the illness at a Pune hospital, raising the death toll linked to the nerve disorder to seven. Recent reports indicate that the suspected GBS cases in the region have risen to 192, following the identification of eight new infections. Confirmed cases stand at 167, with 21 patients currently requiring ventilator support.

According to a Pune civic health official, the man had initially presented with weakness in his lower limbs and was brought to a local hospital. However, he was taken to Nipani in Karnataka on 1 February by family members.

He was subsequently admitted to a hospital in Sangli, where he received intravenous immunoglobulin (IVIg), a common treatment for GBS.

On 5 February, after being discharged against medical advice from the Sangli hospital, he was admitted to the ICU at Kamala Nehru Hospital, run by the Pune Municipal Corporation. During treatment, he experienced a heart rhythm disorder known as supra-ventricular tachycardia and ultimately suffered a cardiac arrest on 9 February.

- The man initially felt weakness in his lower limbs. Later, during treatment, he experienced a heart rhythm disorder and ultimately suffered a cardiac arrest

Of the 192 suspected cases, 91 have emerged from Pune Municipal Corporation areas, with others reported across surrounding regions. Currently, 91 patients have been discharged, while 48 remain in ICU and 21 are on ventilators, according to the state health department's release. *—PTI*

Man dies in wild elephant attack in Kerala's Wayanad; sparks protests

WAYANAD, 11 FEB

A 45-year-old man died in a wild elephant attack in a forest fringe area on the Kerala-Tamil Nadu border in this district, police said on Tuesday.

The victim has been identified as Manu, who hailed from a tribal hamlet in Tamil Nadu.

The incident led to protests by locals of the area on Tuesday, who alleged that they were unable to step out of their homes for fear of being attacked by wild animals, including elephants.

Some local residents said they depend on a small water body nearby for their needs, as no well or water connection has been provided by the government.

"When we come to get water, there will be an elephant there," one of them told a TV channel.

People protested there for some time before allowing the forest and police officials to remove the body of the deceased.

There was also a protest outside the Wayanad Wildlife Warden's office here by UDF workers.

Police said the victim's body was found in a paddy field near the forest area on the Kerala side of the border.

The incident is believed to have occurred on Monday evening.

Locals said he was attacked by a wild elephant while returning from a shop along with his wife after buying groceries.

His body was found in a field near the forest boundary on Tuesday morning. *—PTI*

MILITANTS KIDNAP MANIPUR JOURNO, FORCES APOLOGY

IMPHAL, 11 FEB

A senior journalist in Manipur was allegedly abducted from his home by a group of armed men early Tuesday and released him after he apologised for calling it a "surrendered group".

The family of Yambem Laba said that around 3am on Tuesday, a group of armed men came to their residence at Uripok in Imphal West district and forced him to go with them, officials said.

Laba, who is associated with a Kolkata-based newspaper, later held a press conference from an unknown place.

"Recently, I had called the UNLF (United National Liberation Front), which had entered into a ceasefire with the Centre, a surrendered group. That is a mistake on my part and I withdraw that statement. I had also alleged that some armed men who (earlier) came to my residence as members of the UNLF (Pambei) group. They never said they were so. For this allegation also, I tender my apology and admit my mistake," Laba said.

Led by Kh Pambei, United National Liberation Front (UNLF-P) is an armed group in the Imphal Valley. *—PTI*

Delhi HC junks lookout circular for 2 in farmers' protest

NEW DELHI, 11 FEB

The Delhi High Court has annulled the look out circular (LOC) against two individuals, Thilakasri Krupanand and Shantunu Muluk, linked to the 2021 farmers' protest, citing their full cooperation with the investigation. Justice Sanjeev Narula stated that there was no judicial mandate requiring the pair to remain in India, deeming the continuation of the LOC as "arbitrary and excessive."

The court concluded that the initial FIR did not directly implicate the duo and noted a lack of evidence suggesting their intent to evade legal proceedings.

Despite ongoing investigations lasting almost four years without any charges filed, the court stressed that their previous travels abroad, during which they returned to India, countered any claims of flight risk. The court ordered the Bureau of Immigration to update their records accordingly, dismissing concerns from the Delhi government regarding potential absconding. *—PTI*

Officials said areas around the national capital's three border points might witness traffic congestions on Wednesday because of road closures PHOTO: PTI

A DISTASTEFUL EPISODE

Govt of India sensors Allahbadia's 'talent'

NEW DELHI, 11 FEB

An episode of 'India Got Latent' on YouTube, featuring obscene and vulgar comments by Ranveer Allahbadia, has been blocked following orders from the government, officials said on Tuesday.

"The 'India Has Latent' episode on @YouTube with obscene and perverse comments by Ranveer Allahbadia has been blocked following Government of India orders," posted Kanchan Gupta, Senior Adviser, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, on X.

Allahbadia faced backlash from all quarters after his distasteful comment on parents and sex on comedian Samay Raina's YouTube reality show 'India's Got Latent' went viral on social media on Monday.

The entire video that had Ranveer as the guest panelist on the show has been removed PHOTO: X

The youtuber, popularly known as BeerBiceps, later apologised for his "lapse in judgement" and also said he had asked the show creators to remove the controversial segment.

Meanwhile, a complaint was filed at a police station against Allahbadia over his `obscene and vulgar' comments in comedian Samay Raina's YouTube reality show "India's Got Latent", the police said.

No First Information Report (FIR) has been registered yet, said Tukoganj police station in-charge Jitendra Singh Yadav.

The complaint was filed by Aman Malviya, a local lawyer, Yadav said. Malviya said Allahbadia, Raina and other celebrities who featured in the show crossed all limits of indecency by misusing the freedom of expression.

A few other lawyers also accompanied Malviya to the police station, demanding action against Allahbadia and Raina, and a ban on the show. *—PTI*

Seer gives Centre 33 days to prohibit cow slaughter

MAHAKUMBH NAGAR, 11 FEB

PHOTO: PTI

A seer has given the Centre a 33-day ultimatum to decide on banning cow slaughter and threatened to take a "tough decision" after 17 March.

Swami Avimukteshwaranand Saraswati, the Shankaracharya of the Jyotish Peeth in Uttarakhand, on Tuesday gave the Centre 33 days to decide on banning cow slaughter in the country and declaring cow as "Rashtra Mata".

Speaking to reporters at Shankaracharya Camp in Sector 19 here, the seer said, "It is mentioned in the scriptures that 33 crore gods and goddesses reside in the body of a cow. We have been running a movement to declare the cow as 'Rashtra Mata' for the last one-and-a-half years.

"The central government has 33 days to take a decision. If it fails, then we will take a tough decision after 5 pm on 17 March," Swami Avimukteshwaranand said.

"Our demand from the government is that cow should be removed from the category of animal and declared as 'Rashtra Mata' and cow slaughter should be considered a crime. The state government is going to include the cow in the school curriculum. But even there, if the cow is called an animal, then what is the benefit of it?" he said. *—PTI*

HOME AT LAST

Displaced Palestinians, travelling in vehicles, wait in line to pass through a security checkpoint at the Netzarim corridor as they make their way from central Gaza to their homes in the northern Gaza Strip
PHOTO: PTI

1.5°C temp rise will cause catastrophic harm

Earth is crossing the threshold of 1.5°C of global warming, according to two major global studies which together suggest the planet's climate has likely entered a frightening new phase.

Under the landmark 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change, humanity is seeking to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and keep planetary heating to no more than 1.5°C above the pre-industrial average. In 2024, temperatures on Earth surpassed that limit.

This was not enough to declare the Paris threshold had been crossed, because the temperature goals under the agreement are measured over several decades, rather than short excursions over the 1.5°C mark.

But the two papers just released use a different measure. Both examined historical climate data to determine whether very hot years in the recent past were a sign that a future, long-term warming threshold would be breached.

The answer, alarmingly, was yes. The researchers say the record-hot 2024 indicates Earth is passing the 1.5°C limit, beyond which scientists predict catastrophic harm to the natural systems that support life on Earth.

Earth has also recently experienced individual days and months above the 1.5°C warming mark ***PHOTO: FREEPIK***

2024: the first year of many above 1.5°C

Climate organisations around the world agree last year was the hottest on record. The global average temperature in 2024 was about 1.6°C above the average temperatures in the late-19th century, before humans started burning fossil fuels at large scale.

Earth has also recently experienced individual days and months above the 1.5°C warming mark.

But the global temperature varies from one year to the next. For example, the 2024 temperature spike, while in large part due to climate change, was also driven by a natural El Niño pattern early in the year. That pattern has dissipated for now, and 2025 is forecast to be a little cooler.

These year-to-year fluctuations mean climate scientists don't view a single year exceeding the 1.5°C mark as a failure to meet the Paris Agreement.

However, the new studies published today in Nature Climate Change suggest even a single month or year at 1.5°C global warming may signify Earth is entering a long-term breach of that vital threshold.

What the studies found

The studies were conducted independently by researchers in Europe and Canada. They tackled the same basic question: is a year above 1.5°C global warming a warning sign that we're already crossing the Paris Agreement threshold?

Both studies used observations and climate model simulations to address this question, with slightly different approaches.

In the European paper, the researchers looked at historical warming trends. They found when Earth's average temperature reached a certain threshold, the following 20-year period also reached that threshold.

This pattern suggests that, given Earth reached 1.5°C warming last year, we may have entered a 20-year warming period when average temperatures will also reach 1.5°C.

The Canadian paper involved month-to-month data. June last year was the 12th consecutive month of temperatures above the 1.5°C warming level. The researcher found 12 consecutive months above a climate threshold indicates the threshold will be reached over the long term.

Both studies also demonstrate that even if stringent emissions reduction begins now, Earth is still likely to be crossing the 1.5°C threshold.

Heading in the wrong direction

Given these findings, what humanity does next is crucial.

For decades, climate scientists have warned burning fossil fuels for energy releases carbon dioxide and other gases that are warming the planet.

But humanity's greenhouse gas emissions have continued to increase. Since the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change released its first report in 1990, the world's annual carbon dioxide emissions have risen about 50%.

Put simply, we are not even moving in the right direction, let alone at the required pace.

The science shows greenhouse gas emissions must reach net-zero to end global warming. Even then, some aspects of the climate will continue to change for many centuries, because some regional warming, especially in the oceans, is already locked in and irreversible.

Feeling the heat

The damaging effects of climate change are already being felt across the globe. The harm will be even worse for future generations.

Australia has already experienced 1.5°C of warming, on average, since 1910.

Our unique ecosystems, such as the Great Barrier Reef, are already suffering because of this warming. Our oceans are hotter and seas are rising, hammering our coastlines and threatening marine life.

Bushfires and extreme weather, especially heatwaves, are becoming more frequent and severe. This puts pressure on nature, society and our economy.

Humanity can turn the tide

These studies are a sobering reminder of how far short humanity is falling in tackling climate change.

They show we must urgently adapt to further global warming. Among the suite of changes needed, richer nations must support the poorer countries set to bear the most severe climate harms. While some progress has been made in this regard, far more is needed. A major shift is also needed to decarbonise our societies and economies.

—The Conversation

SALAR سالار

Google drops pledge against AI weapons, raises concerns

Last week, Google quietly abandoned a long-standing commitment to not use artificial intelligence (AI) technology in weapons or surveillance. In an update to its AI principles, which were first published in 2018, the tech giant removed statements promising not to pursue:

- Technologies that cause or are likely to cause overall harm
- Weapons or other technologies whose principal purpose or implementation is to cause or directly facilitate injury to people
- Technologies that gather or use information for surveillance violating internationally accepted norms
- Technologies whose purpose contravenes widely accepted principles of international law and human rights.

The update came after United States President Donald Trump revoked former President Joe Biden's executive order aimed at promoting safe, secure and trustworthy development and use of AI.

The Google decision follows a recent trend of big tech entering the national security arena and accommodating more military applications of AI. So why is this happening now? And what will be the impact of more military use of AI?

The growing trend of militarised AI

In September, senior officials from the Biden government met with bosses of leading AI companies, such as OpenAI, to discuss AI development. The government then announced a taskforce to coordinate the development of data centres, while weighing economic, national security and environmental goals.

The following month, the Biden government published a memo that in part dealt with "harnessing AI to fulfil national security objectives".

Big tech companies quickly heeded the message

In November 2024, tech giant Meta announced it would make its "Llama" AI models available to government agencies and private companies involved in defence and national security.

This was despite Meta's own policy which prohibits the use of Llama for "[m]ilitary, warfare, nuclear industries or applications".

Around the same time, AI company Anthropic also announced it was teaming up with data analytics firm Palantir and Amazon Web Services to provide US intelligence and defence agencies access to its AI models.

The following month, OpenAI announced it had partnered with defence startup Anduril Industries to develop AI for the US Department of Defence.

A large toll on human life

What is already clear is that the use of AI in military contexts has a demonstrated toll on human life.

For example, in the war in Gaza, the Israeli military has been relying heavily on advanced AI tools. These tools require huge volumes of data and greater computing and storage services, which is being provided by Microsoft and Google. These AI tools are used to identify potential targets but are often inaccurate.

Israeli soldiers have said these inaccuracies have accelerated the death toll in the war, which is now more than 61,000, according to authorities in Gaza.

Google removing the "harm" clause from their AI principles contravenes the international law on human rights. This identifies "security of person" as a key measure.

Avoiding the risks of AI-enabled warfare

In its updated principles, Google does say its products will still align with "widely accepted principles of international law and human rights".

Despite this, Human Rights Watch has criticised the removal of the more explicit statements regarding weapons development in the original principles.

The organisation also points out that Google has not explained exactly how its products will align with human rights.

This is something Joe Biden's revoked executive order about AI was also concerned with.

Biden's initiative wasn't perfect, but it was a step towards establishing guardrails for responsible development and use of AI technologies.

Such guardrails are needed now more than ever as big tech becomes more enmeshed with military organisations – and the risk that come with AI-enabled warfare and the breach of human rights increases.

—The Conversation

The Google decision follows a recent trend of big tech entering the national security arena and accommodating more military applications of AI ***PHOTO: PIXABAY***

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

This Chennai aerospace startup boosts nano & micro satellite tech

The thing about Deployer SARATHI is that you are more likely to believe that it is some version of pinball game than pin-based CubeSat separation system that safeguards launch vehicles and delivers satellites to space.

Deployer SARATHI (Spacecraft Assisted Release, and Adaptive technology for High Precision Insertion) is the result of constant push for innovation to simplify mechanisms of the spring plungers that ejects the CubeSats once the doors of the nano and micro satellites' orbital deployers are open on orbit, Srimathy Kesan, founder of Space Kidz India, an aerospace startup told PTI.

The start up focuses on designing, manufacturing and launching nano and micro satellites in India.

Kesan has been invited to display deployers and nano satellites developed by her team at the Aero India 2025's Innovations for Defence Excellence (iDEX) Challenge pavilion as her Deployer X, a non-canisterised pin-based Cubesat separation system, designed for 1U TO 3U CubeSats won the iDEX Challenge 2023.

Unlike larger spacecraft, which have their own adaptors to mount on launch vehicles, CubeSats have a very small volume with little room available for mounting equipment, forcing developers to come up with new ideas, pointed out Kesan.

"The deployers that were used until now in the world were at least three times more than the actual mass of the satellite. That pushes the cost incredibly high. So, now we are working on in an absolutely economical manner and bringing down the mass of the deployer at least to 1/10th of what it actually was," said Kesan.

This is a game changer, insists Kesan.

"We've already validated our Deployer X that we built for 1U to 3U. Now, we are going to be enhancing it for the armed forces. We are building a deployer for 6U, 12U, and 16U," she told PTI.

For Kesan, those deceptively simple looking deployers serve double purpose.

Through her Mission ShaktiSAT, she has already been leveling the space sector for women and the less privileged. Her fourth satellite mission for instance, Azzadisat, which she launched in 2023 via Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), for which she collaborated with the Indian government, Kesan involved 750 girl students from government schools in rural areas.

Dr Srimathy Kesan, Founder, CEO SPACE KIDZ INDIA Mission ***PHOTO: LINKEDIN***

"This ambitious project was born out of a vision to commemorate India's 75th anniversary of independence, Azaadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav. We taught these girls the basic understanding and knowledge of space and then built 75 small experiments and launched an 8U satellite into space through SSLV D3, ISRO," added Kesan.

All the satellites that she has manufactured and launched so far -- 19 NSLVs (Near Space Launch Vehicles), BalloonSATs, 3 Sub-Orbital satellites, and 5 Orbital satellites -- were in fact built by a team of young adults, mostly girls, she said.

Chennai-based Kesan, a B. Com. graduate, said she had embraced being a housewife until she went for a visit to NASA and came across Nano satellites. "I had an epiphany: this is it, this is the purpose of my birth, my journey henceforth," said Kesan.

She said she initially was organising trips for school children to National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), European Space Agency (ESA), and Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Center (GCTC) to help them channelise their awe of space into a probable career in space tech.

Then, when she gained enough knowledge, she began teaching the nuances of building a BalloonSAT to economically challenged students from Seychelles in Africa, with support from UNESCO.

Later, she said, she began putting together a team to build those satellites, through her startup Space Kidz India.

"Space Kidz India is now a decade old, we started off by launching high altitude balloons, then sub orbital because, ultimately, we wanted to enter into orbital satellites. We have built 27 space missions, and I am the only woman founder in the world to have had high school and university students build real time satellites with applications, that is, for telecommunication," said Kesan.

Her guidance led to the historic launch of KALAMSAT, world's lightest and first-ever 3-D printed satellite that she launched via NASA's Terrier Orion rocket, in 2017.

Kesan wants to take this further with her newly developed deployer under the 1U TO 3U category, which is already in space. According to her, it has been validated in the SSLV-D3, along with EOS-08 that was launched on 16 August, 2024, by ISRO.

"Girls, or women, in the space industry form only about 14 per cent to 19 per cent. So, I advocate for girls. That's the reason the next step is Mission ShaktiSAT," said Kesan.

Simply put, through the mission, 12,000 girls from every corner of the globe, representing 108 diverse nations like Eswatini, Lesotho and Burkino Faso, will build a "spacecraft to the Moon".

"We are enhancing the deployer model and building a different design that is going to be 6U, 12U and 16U, making more launches possible at economical cost," said Kesan.

She said that on day one of Aero India 2025, she met potential backers for the project that will cost Rs 2 crore.

11 February happens to be international day for women and girls in science. *—PTI*

Trump to Hamas: Free hostages by Sat, or else...

Hamas will find out what I mean: US Prez on stepping in

WASHINGTON, 11 FEB

President Donald Trump said Monday that the ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas should be cancelled if Hamas does not release all remaining hostages it is holding in Gaza by midday on Saturday – though he also said that such a decision would be up to Israel.

Trump was responding to Hamas accusing Israel of violating the three-week-old ceasefire and announcing that it will delay the further release of hostages in the Gaza Strip.

The US president said that after the freeing of three visibly emaciated hostages on Saturday it was time for Israel to demand the release of all hostages by noon on Saturday, or restart the war.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he has visited the White House 20 times with US presidents, but the meeting with Trump was the most important and significant one he ever had **PHOTO: X**

"If they're not here, all hell is going to break out," Trump said. He added of the ceasefire, "Cancel it, and all bets are off."

Trump, however, said the final decision would be up to Israel, saying, "I'm speaking for myself. Israel can override it."

When asked if the US would join in a response to Hamas if hostages were not freed, Trump said, "Hamas will find out what I mean."

Meanwhile, the Hamas announcement has brought new dismay for Israelis who watched the latest Hamas handover of hostages in growing horror over the weekend as the three emaciated men came into sight.

Of the hostages yet to be released from Gaza under this phase of the ceasefire, Israel has said eight are dead.

The next handover of three hostages had been scheduled for Saturday, and families say time is running out for those still alive. Israel now awaits the outcome of a security Cabinet meeting on Tuesday morning, moved up in response to Monday's Hamas announcement. *—PTI*

Trump to host Jordan's King Abdullah II

WASHINGTON, 11 FEB

President Trump will host Jordan's King Abdullah II at the White House on Tuesday as he escalates pressure on the Arab nation to take in refugees from Gaza – perhaps permanently – as part of his plan to remake the Middle East.

The visit comes at a perilous moment for the Gaza ceasefire. Hamas has paused hostage release, accusing Israel of violating the truce, and Trump has called for Israel to resume fighting if all captives are not freed by this weekend. *—PTI*

US freezes bribery law behind Adani's trouble

WASHINGTON, 11 FEB

US President Donald Trump has signed an executive order directing the Department of Justice to pause enforcing a nearly half-century-old law that was used to launch a bribery investigation against the Adani Group.

Trump signed an order to pause enforcing of the 1977 Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (FCPA) that prohibits American companies and foreign firms from bribing officials of foreign governments to obtain or retain business.

The President directed US Attorney General Pam Bondi to pause enforcement of FCPA, which was at the heart of some of the US Department of Justice's most high-profile cases, including an indictment against Indian billionaire and Adani Group head Gautam Adani and his nephew Sagar.

Last year, the DoJ charged Adani for allegedly being part of a scheme to pay over USD 250M bribe to Indian officials in exchange of favourable terms for solar power contracts.

Meanwhile, six US Congressmen have written to Bondi against "questionable" decisions made by the US Department of Justice (DoJ) such as the indictment against the Adani Group in

BID TO BLOCK DOGE ACCESS TO PVT DATA

WASHINGTON, 11 FEB

A coalition of labour unions filed a lawsuit on Monday, asking the federal court in Maryland to stop Elon Musk's team from accessing private data at the education and treasury departments and office of personnel management.

The suit alleges the Trump administration violated federal privacy laws when it gave Department of Government Efficiency access to systems with personal information on tens of millions of Americans without their consent. *—PT*

TRUMP ORDERS RETURN OF PLASTIC STRAW

WASHINGTON, 11 FEB

President Trump on Monday said he is banning federal use of paper straws. Instead, he wants the government to exclusively move to plastic.

"I don't think that plastic is going to affect a shark...as they're munching their way through the ocean," Trump said as he signed an executive order that directs federal agencies to stop buying paper straws "and otherwise ensure that paper straws are no longer provided within agency buildings." *—PTI*

Saudi frees student sentenced to 34 yrs for Twitter activity

DUBAI, 11 FEB

A Saudi doctoral student at Leeds University in Britain has been freed after seeing her 34-year sentence in Saudi Arabia for her activity on Twitter drastically reduced, a rights group said Monday Salma al-Shehab had been sentenced to 34 years in prison in 2022 over her tweets, part of a wider crackdown on dissent as Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has taken over as its de facto ruler. A London-based Saudi rights group, ALQST, announced her release. In January, ALQST and other groups said al-Shehab had seen her sentence reduced to four years in prison, with an additional four years suspended. "Her full freedom must now be granted, including the right to travel to complete her studies," it said. *—PTI*

Suicide bomber kills 5, injures 7 in Afghanistan

ISLAMABAD, 11 FEB

A suicide bomber blew himself up near a bank in northern Afghanistan on Tuesday, killing at least five people and wounding seven others, police said. The attack happened near a branch of the Kabul Bank in Kunduz, said Jumauddin Khaksar, a police spokesman. The dead included a guard at the bank. No one has claimed responsibility for the attack and Khaksar said police were working to track down those who orchestrated the attack. Militants from the Afghan chapters of the Islamic State group have carried out bombings across Afghanistan, though suicide attacks have become rare since the Taliban seized power in August 2021, as US and NATO forces withdrew after 20 years of war. *—PTI*

Ebola cases in Uganda rise to 9, 265 quarantined

KAMPALA, 11 FEB

Ebola cases in Uganda have risen to nine, while 265 other people were being monitored under quarantine, health authorities said Tuesday. The nine include the first victim, a male nurse who died the day before the outbreak was declared on Jan 30. That man remains the only fatality. Eight patients "are receiving medical care and are in stable condition," a Health Ministry statement said. Seven of them were admitted to the main public hospital in Kampala, the Ugandan capital, in addition to one being treated in the eastern district of Mbale, the ministry said, adding that "the situation is under control" amid heightened surveillance. The nurse who died had first sought treatment in Kampala and later travelled to Mbale, where he was admitted to a public hospital. *—PTI*

Singapore minister sounds terror alert

SINGAPORE, 11 FEB

Singapore's Law and Home Affairs Minister K Shanmugam on Tuesday warned people to be mentally prepared for a potential terror incident as authorities have caught more radicalised individuals in the city-state.

The minister issued the warning while highlighting recent cases involving a teenager, a housewife, and a cleaner who were dealt with under the Internal Security Act for their extremist plans.

Shanmugam made the remarks at the Sri Thendayuthapani Temple in the central business district, where Hindu devotees were celebrating Thaipusam 2025, a festival celebrated to honour Lord Murugan.

Thaipusam is a festival celebrated by people of Tamil origin in Singapore, Malaysia and southern parts of India.

"This is the third young man that we have now issued orders against on far-right extremist ideology. He has

K Shanmugam **PHOTO: X**

been consuming all the junk on race issues, and has convinced himself on far-right supremacy," The Straits Times quoted Shanmugam as saying. He was referring to a student whose detention was announced on Monday by the Home Ministry.

The 18-year-old student roleplayed as a terrorist in an online game, and wanted to start a race war between the Chinese and the Malays.

He idolised Australian white supremacist Brenton Tarrant, who killed 51 people in two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, in March 2019. The teen wanted to attack Muslims at a mosque in Singapore. *—PTI*

Vance rails against 'excessive' curbs on AI

PARIS, 11 FEB

In his first major policy address since assuming office, US Vice President JD Vance cautioned global leaders and tech executives against "excessive regulation" of artificial intelligence (AI), claiming such measures could stifle the rapidly growing industry.

The summit, which is being co-hosted by French President Emmanuel Macron and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, takes place as tech giants vie for supremacy in the rapidly evolving sector and while China's release of DeepSeek last month showed the country's ability to rival major Western players like ChatGPT.

Prominent attendees include European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and US Vice President JD Vance.

Speaking at a global summit in Paris, Vance argued that the US, under the Trump administration, would ensure that AI systems remain free from ideological bias and protect citizens' free speech rights. He also voiced concerns about foreign governments tightening regulations on US tech companies.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi with US Vice President JD Vance and other delegates at the AI Action Summit in Paris on Tuesday **PHOTO: PTI**

Vance's remarks highlighted a significant divergence in global approaches to AI governance. While the US favours a hands-off approach, Europe seeks tighter regulation. Leyen, addressing AI's societal impact, announced a 200 billion euro investment in AI, including a new 20 billion euro fund for AI gigafactories.

The summit exposed tensions between the US, Europe, and China, with Beijing promoting open-source AI and decrying Western restrictions. Vance, a critic of European content moderation policies, also touched on NATO, Ukraine, and US-China relations, emphasising the shifting global balance of power in AI development. *—PTI*

Ukraine, Russia trade long-range attacks

KYIV, 11 FEB

Russian forces targeted Ukraine's energy and gas infrastructure in a "massive" nighttime missile attack and Ukrainian drones struck an important oil refinery inside Russia, officials said on Tuesday, as the almost three-year war rumbled on against a backdrop of renewed diplomatic efforts to end it.

Ukraine's state energy company, Ukrenergo, said it imposed emergency blackouts due to the Russian attack. Russia has repeatedly hammered Ukraine's power grid throughout the war.

Meanwhile, as part of its long-range drone campaign against targets deep inside Russia, Ukraine hit a refinery in Russia's Saratov region about 500km from Ukraine's border, the Army General Staff claimed. The facility produces gasoline, fuel oil and diesel fuel for the Russian military, it said.

PHOTO: PTI

Outside Ukraine, international efforts are afoot to stop the fighting.

President Donald Trump's senior advisers are expected to meet with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy later this week on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference to discuss a path towards ending the war.

- President Trump's senior advisers are expected to meet with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy later this week to discuss a path towards ending the war

Vice President JD Vance, Secretary of State Marco Rubio and retired Lt Gen Keith Kellogg, Trump's special envoy to Ukraine and Russia, are among the US administration officials traveling to Germany for the summit.

Also, Zelenskyy said late Monday that Trump's representatives will visit Ukraine this week, ahead of Munich, though he didn't provide details.

The Ukrainian air force said Russia fired 124 Shahed and decoy drones across Ukraine overnight. *—PTI*

Congolese rebels kill 55 civilians in villages

GOMA, 11 FEB

Militia fighters from the CODECO group killed at least 55 civilians in an attack on villages and a displaced persons' camp in northeastern Congo, local authorities confirmed on Tuesday.

The attack occurred late Monday in the Djaiba area of Ituri province, where CODECO militants, mostly from the ethnic Lendu farming community, carried out the assault.

The attack left a significant number of dead, and the toll is expected to rise as bodies are recovered from the burned villages. Antoinnette Nzale, the leader of the displaced persons' camp, said many people were killed with machetes and firearms. The region has long been plagued by conflict, with over 120 armed groups vying for land and control of mineral-rich areas.

- The attack occurred late Monday in the Djaiba area of Ituri province, where CODECO militants, mostly from the ethnic Lendu farming community, carried out the assault

Jean Richard Lenga, chief of Bahema Badjere district, confirmed the incident, with at least 38 casualties reported so far. The UN peacekeeping mission, MONUSCO, and Congolese government troops attempted to intervene but were outnumbered by the attackers.

CODECO's attacks have been ongoing, with nearly 1,800 people killed between 2018 and 2022. *—PTI*

55 die as bus falls into gorge in Guatemala

GUATEMALA CITY, 11 FEB

At least 55 people are dead after their bus plunged into a gorge and landed under a bridge Monday on the outskirts of Guatemala's capital.

Investigators from the public ministry said that there were 53 bodies recovered at the scene and the San Juan de Dios Hospital confirmed that two passengers brought there had also died.

Firefighting spokesperson Edwin Villagran said a multi-vehicle crash sent the bus off the road and into the steep gorge below the bridge before dawn. Others were seriously injured.

The bus fell 115 feet into a sewage-polluted stream. It landed upside down.

The bus had come from Progreso, northeast of the capital. Volunteer firefighting spokesman Óscar Sánchez said children were among the victims.

The bus fell 115 feet into a sewage-polluted stream **PHOTO: X**

President Bernardo Arévalo offered his condolences and declared a day of national mourning. *—PTI*

LITMUS TEST

'24 corruption study sees many nations slide

BERLIN, 11 FEB

Transparency International, which compiles the annual Corruption Perceptions Index, has found that 47 countries out of the 180 it surveyed had their lowest score last year since it started using its current methodology for its global ranking in 2012.

The 2024 report released on Tuesday said "global corruption levels remain alarmingly high, with efforts to reduce them faltering."

The organisation measures the perception of public sector corruption according to 13 data sources, including the World Bank, the World Economic Forum and private risk and consulting companies.

It ranks 180 countries and territories on a scale from a "highly corrupt" 0 to a "very clean" 100.

PHOTO: DALL-E 2025

The global average remained unchanged from 2023 at 43, with more than two-thirds of countries scoring under 50, Transparency International said. Denmark held on to first place with an unchanged 90 points, followed by Finland with 88 and Singapore with 84. New Zealand dropped from third to fourth, shedding two points to 83.

South Sudan slid to the bottom of the index with just eight points, displacing Somalia. They were followed by Venezuela with 10 and Syria with 12.

The US slid from 69 points to 65 and from 24th place to 28th. France dropped four points to 67 and five places to 25th. Germany went down three points to 75 and six places to 15th. It tied with Canada, which was down one point and three places.

In Asia and the Pacific, governments "are still failing to deliver on anti-corruption pledges," Transparency International said. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Rupee ends 63P up; logs highest 1-day gain in 2 years

NEW DELHI, 11 FEB

The rupee on Tuesday rallied 63 paise, recording its steepest single-day recovery in nearly two years, to settle at 86.82 (provisional) against the US dollar, backed by dollar selling by banks. According to forex traders, Tuesday's sharp gain a day after sliding closer to the 88 level shows a highly volatile currency market amid concerns over the worldwide tariff war. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 87.45 against the greenback and touched the intraday high of 86.61 during the session. The unit settled at 86.82 (provisional) against the dollar, registering a gain of 63 paise from its previous close. Meanwhile, the US dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was 0.01 per cent lower at 108.18. *—PTI*

Rapido announces ESOP liquidation programme

NEW DELHI, 11 FEB

Mobility startup Rapido on Tuesday announced its first-ever Employee Stock Ownership Plan (ESOP) liquidation programme for current and former employees. Through this initiative, employees are eligible to sell a portion of their vested ESOP units immediately. The move by the company is aimed at enhancing employee satisfaction and retention while fostering a culture of shared success and growth within the organisation, according to a release. The ESOP buyback programme saw participation from both current and former employees of Rapido, the release said, adding that the response underlined their strong belief in the company's vision and growth potential. *—PTI*

TCS to modernise depository system of Oman's MCD

NEW DELHI, 11 FEB

India's largest IT services company Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) on Tuesday said it has signed an agreement to modernise the depository system of Muscat Clearing and Depository (MCD). MCD -- Oman's central securities depository -- provides comprehensive Clearing, Settlement, and Depository (CSD) services to all market participants. According to a release, the IT services company will implement its flagship offering, TCS BaNCS, for market infrastructure and Quartz to "future-proof" MCD's operations. The release did not specify the financial details of the deal. In addition to CSD solutions, MCD will benefit from TCS' global expertise and ability to offer new services to the market, such as collateral management, central counterparty clearing and risk management. *—PTI*

OYO to invest $10M in US-based G6 digital assets

NEW DELHI, 11 FEB

Travel tech unicorn OYO on Tuesday announced its plans to invest USD 10 million to grow the digital assets of US-based G6 Hospitality, including its website and app. OYO recently acquired iconic American budget hotel chain Motel 6 and Studio 6 brands from Blackstone Real Estate for USD 525 million in an all-cash transaction, as it eyes expansion in the US. The company plans to accelerate G6 Hospitality's growth, targeting the addition of over 150 hotels in 2025 under the Motel 6 and Studio 6 brands. This expansion is expected to strengthen the brands' presence in key markets such as Texas, California, Georgia and Arizona. *—PTI*

Mkts tank 1% amid foreign fund exodus

D-Street investors become poorer by Rs 16.97 lakh crore in five days of market crash

MUMBAI, 11 FEB

Sensex dropped 1,018.20 points or 1.32 per cent to settle at a two-week low of 76,293.60 **PHOTO: PIXABAY**

Benchmark stock indices Sensex and Nifty tanked more than 1 per cent on Tuesday amid unabated foreign fund outflows and fresh US tariffs that reignited trade war fears.

Declining for the fifth day running, the 30-share BSE Sensex dropped 1,018.20 points or 1.32 per cent to settle at a two-week low of 76,293.60. During the day, it tumbled 1,281.21 points or 1.65 per cent to 76,030.59.

The NSE Nifty cracked 309.80 points or 1.32 per cent to 23,071.80 with 44 of its constituents closing lower and six with gains.)

Equity investors became poorer by Rs 16.97 lakh crore in five days of market crash as persistent foreign fund outflows and fresh US tariffs that reignited trade war fears dented sentiments.

In the past five days, the BSE bellwether gauge slumped 2,290.21 points or 2.91 per cent.

Among 30 Sensex shares, Zomato tanked over 5 per cent. Tata Steel, Bajaj Finserv, Tata Motors, Power Grid, Larsen & Toubro, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Hindustan Unilever and ITC were the biggest laggards.

Bharti Airtel was the only gainer among Sensex scrips.

In the past five days, the BSE bellwether gauge has slumped 2,290.21 points or 2.91 per cent, while the Nifty tanked 667.45 points or 2.81 per cent.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 2,463.72 crore on Monday, according to exchange data.

The BSE smallcap gauge plunged 3.40 per cent and midcap index tumbled 2.88 per cent. *—PTI*

Asian stocks down after Trump's tariffs

HONG KONG, 11 FEB

Stocks in Asia were mostly down Tuesday, after US President Donald Trump imposed 25 per cent tariffs on all US imports of steel and aluminum.

Hong Kong's Hang Seng index declined 0.87 per cent to 21,335.38, while the Shanghai Composite dipped 0.12 per cent to 3,318.06. Japan markets were closed for a national holiday. Meanwhile, the S&P/ASX 200 in Australia remained largely unchanged and South Korea's KOSPI was up 0.71 per cent to 2,539.05.

Fear around tariffs has been at the centre of Wall Street's moves recently, and experts say the market likely has more swings ahead. The price of gold, which often rises when investors are feeling nervous, climbed again Monday to top $2,930 per ounce and set another record.

The S&P 500 rose 40.45 points to 6,066.44 on Monday. The Dow Jones Industrial Average added 167.01 to 44,4701.41, and the Nasdaq composite jumped 190.87 to 19,714.27.

In energy trading, benchmark US crude added 51 cents to $72.83 a barrel. Brent crude, the international standard, rose 44 cents to $76.31 a barrel.

In currency trading, the US dollar remained largely unchanged at about 151.95 Japanese yen. The euro cost $1.0305, also largely unchanged. *—PTI*

25 BLOCKS ON OFFER

India opens biggest oil, gas block bid round

NEW DELHI, 11 FEB

PHOTO: PTI

India on Tuesday opened its largest oil and gas bid round, offering 25 blocks covering 1.91 lakh square kilometers mostly in offshore area, as the government looks to boost domestic production to cut imports and help energy security.

Petroleum Minister Hardeep Singh Puri launched the 10th bid round under the Open Acreage Licensing Policy (OALP) at the India Energy Week (IEW) here.

OALP-X round will feature 25 blocks spread over 1,91,986 square kilometers in 13 sedimentary basins. 13 of the blocks are in the offshore area.

In the previous nine rounds, 3.78 lakh sq km area was offered.

The last bid round, OALP-IX, was the largest before the current bid round.

The OALP-IX bid round featured 28 blocks or areas spread over 1.36 lakh sq km were offered for finding and producing oil and gas.

OALP-IX in September attracted four bidders that included state-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) and Oil India Ltd and private sector Vedanta Ltd, with most blocks getting just two bids, according to the Directorate General of Hydrocarbons (DGH). It also for the first time saw Reliance Industries Ltd-BP Plc combine bidding together with ONGC for one block in Gujarat offshore.

Mining billionaire Anil Agarwal-owned Vedanta Ltd bid for all the 28 blocks on offer while Sun Petrochemicals Ltd bid for seven areas.

Of the 28 blocks on offer, four blocks got three bids. *—PTI*

ONGC INKS DEAL WITH BP TO BOOST OUTPUT BY 60%

NEW DELHI, 11 FEB

Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Ltd (ONGC) has signed a contract with global oil major BP for raising output from its flagship Mumbai High oil and gas field by up to 60 per cent over the next decade.

BP will be Technical Services Provider (TSP) for the Mumbai High field, India's largest and most prolific offshore oil field, the two firms said in a statement.

BP will work in close collaboration with ONGC to stabilise the field's current production decline and restore it to a robust growth trajectory.

In terms of oil and oil equivalent gas, the increase works out to 60 per cent (from 70.40 million tonnes of oil equivalent to 112.63 million tonnes of oil equivalent).

The increase is expected to be visible from FY26 (April 2025 to March 2026 financial year) with full-scale visibility expected from FY28 (April 2027 to March 2028). *—PTI*

SEBI bans LS Industries, 4 others from markets

NEW DELHI, 11 FEB

PHOTO: PTI

SEBI on Tuesday restrained Himachal Pradesh-based LS Industries, its promoter Profound Finance and four others from the securities markets till further orders following allegations of fraudulent activities and stock price manipulation.

The markets regulator also directed Jahangir Panikkaveettil Perumbarambathu (JPP), a Dubai-based NRI public shareholder, to impound unlawful gains of Rs 1.14 crore from the sale of shares as part of a prima facie fraudulent scheme, the order said.

Suresh Goyal, Alka Sahni, Shashi Kant Sahni HUF and JPP were also prohibited from the securities market by SEBI till further orders. The regulator directed the entities to co-operate with SEBI's investigation by furnishing all relevant information.

The matter pertains to LS Industries and its key associates were involved in artificially inflating the company's share price despite negligible revenue and financial instability.

In an interim order passed on Tuesday, SEBI noted that LS Industries Ltd (LSIL), a BSE-listed entity, and its promoter devised a scheme in which the former director of the company, Suet Meng Chay, initially transferred a 12.12 per cent stake of the company to JPP for just USD 1.

Following a media report which highlighted the abnormal valuation of LS Industries worth Rs 5,500 crore despite having zero revenue. Pursuant to that, SEBI conducted a preliminary check which suggested irregularities. *—PTI*

India backs energy shift with fossil fuel needs

NEW DELHI, 11 FEB

Calling for a nuanced understanding on 'energy transition', India on Tuesday said the shift from polluting fossil fuels to cleaner sources should be just where affordable energy is available to meet needs of developing nations.

Speaking at the inaugural session of India Energy Week, Oil Minister Hardeep Singh Puri said energy transition "is not outright replacement (of any fuel) but more shifting the primacy of one energy source over another."

Developing nations like India meet most of the energy demand from fossil fuels such as coal, oil and natural gas. While there is a call to shift from the polluting sources to renewables, India feels that move cannot be abrupt, with oil and gas as well as coal continuing to meet energy demand in the period when the cleaner sources scaled up.

For too long, energy transition has to be framed as a linear journey - from fossil fuels to renewables, from past to future, from problem to solution.

A fragmented transition risks deepening inequality, leaving billions without reliable energy while wealthier nations surge ahead. "If the transition is not just, it will not succeed because the political economy will not allow it."

Puri said the world is witnessing a recalibration of strategy, prioritising near-term profitability while keeping long-term transition efforts in play.

On the other hand, expanding clean cooking access requires a multi-fuel strategy, scaling traditional LPG, augmenting bio-CNG, accelerating electrification, and channelling investments into areas such as integrating renewables. *—PTI*

Gold snaps 7-day rally, declines Rs 200

NEW DELHI, 11 FEB

PHOTO: PTI

Snapping the seven-day winning run, gold prices declined by Rs 200 to Rs 88,300 per 10 grams in the national capital following selling by stockists amid a bearish trend in global markets.

Gold of 99.5 per cent purity also dropped Rs 200 to Rs 87,900 per 10 grams from the previous close of Rs 88,100 per 10 grams.

Additionally, silver prices decreased Rs 900 to Rs 96,600 per kg from the previous trading close of Rs 97,500 per kg on Monday.

Traders said the yellow metal prices depreciated ahead of Fed Chair Jerome Powell's testimony to Congress, which will be closely watched for insights about the US Federal Reserve's future interest rate-cut path.

The precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity had surged by Rs 2,430 to hit an all-time high level of Rs 88,500 per 10 grams on Monday, according to the All India Sarafa Association.

In the last seven sessions, gold soared Rs 5,660 or 6.8 per cent. This year, the yellow metal has risen Rs 8,910 or 11.22 per cent.

On the MCX, gold futures for April delivery declined Rs 333 to Rs 85,483 per 10 grams.

During the day, the yellow metal futures touched a lifetime high of Rs 86,360 per 10 grams.

The upcoming US Consumer Price Index (CPI) data and Powell's testimony will be key events for gold traders, as the dollar index remains around USD 108, Trivedi added.

Silver futures for March delivery slumped Rs 1,030 or 1.08 per cent to Rs 94,265 per kg on the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX). *—PTI*

- Additionally, silver prices decreased Rs 900 to Rs 96,600 per kg from the previous trading close of Rs 97,500 per kg on Monday. Gold of 99.5 per cent purity also dropped Rs 200 to Rs 87,900 per 10 grams

'NO THANKS'

Altman rejects Musk's $97B OpenAI bid

CALIFORNIA, 11 FEB

Tesla CEO Elon Musk and OpenAI CEO Sam Altman **PHOTO: X**

Sam Altman, CEO of OpenAI, has turned down a $97.4 billion (£78.4 billion) acquisition bid from a consortium led by Elon Musk. The proposal, submitted to OpenAI's board on Monday by Musk's attorney Marc Toberoff, sought to acquire all of the company's assets.

The bid marks the latest chapter in an ongoing feud between Musk—Tesla and X owner and a close advisor to US President Donald Trump—and Altman over OpenAI's direction.

The two co-founded OpenAI in 2015 as a nonprofit, but their relationship has soured since Musk's departure in 2018.

Responding to the takeover offer, Altman quipped on Musk's social media platform X: "No thank you but we will buy Twitter for $9.74 billion if you want." His outright rejection does not entirely rule out the deal, as OpenAI's board still has a say and could consider the bid, particularly if a higher offer emerges.

However, questions remain about Musk's intentions—whether he genuinely seeks control of OpenAI or if the bid is a strategic move in his ongoing legal dispute with the company.

Critics also point out that OpenAI's latest funding round valued it at $157 billion in October 2024, with reports suggesting ongoing talks could push its valuation to $300 billion—far above Musk's offer.

Meanwhile, OpenAI has announced a major AI infrastructure initiative in partnership with Oracle, a Japanese investment firm, and an Emirati sovereign wealth fund.

Dubbed 'The Stargate Project,' the $500 billion venture was unveiled at the White House by President Trump, who described it as "the largest AI infrastructure project in history." *—Agencies*

AI usage in India up, twice the global average

NEW DELHI, 11 FEB

Reflecting the swift adoption of artificial intelligence in India, a Microsoft study has found that 65 per cent of Indians surveyed have used AI -- more than double the global average.

Microsoft on Tuesday unveiled the Global Online Safety Survey, which studies the growing influence of AI. The survey is based on a survey of 15,000 teens (13-17) and adults that was conducted in 15 countries between 19 July and 9 August, 2024.

"65 per cent of respondents have used AI (+26 per cent from 2023). This is more than double the global average of 31 per cent in the same time period.

"India is most excited about using AI for translations, answering questions, increasing efficiency at work and helping students with schoolwork," the report said.

The report showed that millennials (people aged 25-44) lead adoption, with 84 per cent reporting usage.

Indian parents are more aware of their children's digital challenges, showing increased awareness compared to the previous year, it said.

However, India also has some reservations about AI, including concerns about online abuse, deepfakes, scams, and AI hallucinations, mirroring global trends.

Online abuse was among the top worries regarding AI.

"More than 80 per cent of respondents worry about AI usage for children under 18 years," the report noted.

Over 80 per cent of Indian teens said they have experienced an online risk. *—PTI*

Esports Olympics debut in Saudi delayed to 2027

LAUSANNE, 11 FEB

The inaugural Olympic Esports Games will take place in Riyadh in 2027, two years later than initially anticipated. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) announced that Saudi Arabia's Esports World Cup Foundation will serve as the event's founding partner. The first Esports World Cup, held in Riyadh last year, featured substantial prize money across games like Call of Duty and Fortnite. While specific shooter titles have yet to be approved, a six-member panel—co-chaired by IOC veteran Ser Miang Ng and Saudi sports minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Turki Al Faisal—will determine the games programme. Following a 12-year agreement secured last July, the IOC plans to hold the Esports Olympics every two years, starting in 2025. *—PTI*

Kohli's form in focus as India eye ODI sweep over England

Final ODI will be played today, marking end of CT build-up

AHMEDABAD, 11 FEB

A big knock from Virat Kohli's currently silent bat along with a series clean-sweep over England will be on Team India's wish-list when the two teams square off in the third and final ODI here on Wednesday, marking the end of their Champions Trophy build-up.

While India hold an unassailable 2-0 lead with identical four-wicket wins in each of the first two ODIs, Rohit Sharma's men will be extra motivated to get a win here at the Narendra Modi Stadium where they had suffered a crushing ODI World Cup final loss in 2023.

Needless to say, having their batting mainstay Kohli among runs and a win would be perfect culmination to the home side's Champions Trophy preparations. The eight-team competition gets underway from February 19 in Karachi with India starting against Bangladesh the next day in Dubai as per a hybrid model of hosting.

> Kohli is world's best player regardless of form
>
> -Chris Gayle, ex-West Indian swashbuckler

The team has already got a shot in the arm by Rohit's return to form. His 90-ball 119 in the second ODI was a source of relief to both.

India don't seem to have put a foot wrong in this series as they continue to make the most of their rich reservoir of talent.

Both India and England will enjoy an off day as they have skipped training and other pre-match routines to rest and recuperate. *—PTI*

SQUAD

India: Rohit Sharma (c), Shubman Gill (vc), Yashasvi Jaiswal, Virat Kohli, Shreyas Iyer, KL Rahul (wk), Rishabh Pant (wk), Hardik Pandya, Ravindra Jadeja, Washington Sundar, Axar Patel, Kuldeep Yadav, Harshit Rana, Mohd. Shami, Arshdeep Singh and Varun Chakaravarthy.

England: Jos Buttler (c&wk), Harry Brook, Ben Duckett, Joe Root, Philip Salt, Jamie Smith (wk), Tom Banton, Brydon Carse, Liam Livingstone, Jamie Overton, Jofra Archer, Gus Atkinson, Saqib Mahmood, Adil Rashid and Mark Wood.

Match starts at 1.30pm IST

PHOTO:X

Surrey & RIL retain majority in Oval Invincible deal

LONDON, 11 FEB

Surrey County Cricket Club (SCCC) has announced a partnership with Reliance Industries, as their subsidiary, RISE Worldwide, acquires a 49 per cent stake in the Oval Invincible for £60 million. Despite the investment, SCCC will maintain a majority stake of 51 per cent in the team competing in The Hundred. The collaboration aims to leverage the experience of Mumbai Indians, who have recently achieved remarkable success, including clinching league titles in South Africa. The Oval Invincibles have become a powerhouse in The Hundred, winning four titles in as many years. Nita M. Ambani, owner of Mumbai Indians, expressed pride in the partnership, promising to nurture talent and deepen fan engagement across multiple regions. *—PTI*

Shillong to host men's football matches in March

NEW DELHI, 11 FEB

Shillong's Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium is set to host two fixtures for the Indian senior men's national football team during the FIFA international window in March, the All India Football Federation (AIFF) announced on Tuesday. This follows the stadium's recent use for a match in the Indian Super League on 7 February. This marks the first time the refurbished 15,100-seater stadium will welcome senior men's international matches. On March 19, India will face the Maldives in an international friendly ahead of the AFC Asian Cup 2027 Qualifiers Final Round. Subsequently, they will play Bangladesh on March 25, kicking off their campaign in the qualifiers, alongside teams from Hong Kong and Singapore. *—PTI*

Mumbai City aims to beat FC Goa in ISL

MUMBAI, 11 FEB

Mumbai City FC, unbeaten in 13 matches against FC Goa in the Indian Super League (ISL), looks to maintain their dominance as they face their west coast rivals on Wednesday. The Islanders aim to secure a fourth league double over FC Goa, having achieved it in previous seasons (2017-18, 2021-22, and 2022-23). Currently sitting fifth in the table with 31 points, a victory will elevate them into the top four. FC Goa, meanwhile, holds second place with 36 points, seeking to secure a semi-final spot without entering the eliminators. Both teams have different goals, but the match's outcome could significantly impact the title race as well. Coaches Petr Kratky and Manolo Marquez stress the importance of focusing solely on the upcoming clash. *—PTI*

36TH GOLD OVERALL

Advani wins Indian Snooker Championship

India's most accomplished player Pankaj Advani **PHOTO: PTI**

INDORE, 11 FEB

India's most accomplished player Pankaj Advani secured his 36th overall national title and 10th men's snooker crown at the Yashwant Club, in a commanding display of skill and determination.

The ONGC employee overcame an early setback to defeat Brijesh Damani in a final where Damani managed to take the opening frame, the only one he would claim throughout the match.

The tournament serves as the only selection event for the Asian and World Championships.

Advani's performance was marked by consistency and precision. After falling behind by a frame, he maintained his composure and controlled the table, leaving little room for error. In the final frame, Advani delivered an impressive 84 break, sealing the frame, match and championship.

The high pressure tournament proved to be a full-circle moment for Advani.

In the group stage, he had suffered his only loss of the competition at the hands of Damani, where he managed to win only one frame.

The rivalry took an ironic turn in the final when the tables were turned and Advani emerged victorious, dropping just one frame in the match.

With the Asian Snooker Championship scheduled to commence from February 15, both Advani and Damani now face the opportunity to play for the tricolour on the international stage. *—PTI*

Ending cash rewards for GM, IM titles not ideal: Erigaisi

NEW DELHI, 11 FEB

Indian Grandmaster Arjun Erigaisi has expressed his disappointment over the government's recent decision to discontinue cash rewards for achieving Grandmaster and International Master titles. Previously, players received Rs four lakh for a Grandmaster title and Rs 1.5 lakh for an International Master or International Women Master title. From this month, funding will only be available for success in world-level competitions.

Erigaisi stated that while young players may not be demotivated by the absence of financial incentives, the decision could negatively impact their parents, who often face significant financial decisions regarding their children's chess pursuits. "It's not ideal," he remarked, highlighting that such rewards could encourage parents to support their children's passion for chess over more conventional studies.

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for a Grandmaster title
and Rs 1.5 lakh
for an International Master or International Women Master title.
From this month, funding will only be available for success in world-level competitions

Following a stellar 2024 where he achieved a remarkable 2800 ELO rating and won gold at the men's Olympiad, the 21-year-old's start to 2025 has been less favourable, finishing 10th at the Tata Steel Chess tournament. Erigaisi acknowledged that his risk-taking style, which has yielded both success and setbacks, needs adjustment.

Despite losing 29 rating points during the event, he remains unconcerned. "I don't care about rating points much; it's about trying to qualify for the Candidates," he stated.

Looking ahead, Erigaisi is keen to compete in the Norway Chess tournament, eager to face elite players like Magnus Carlsen and Hikaru Nakamura in classical play. *—PTI*

Torrent to acquire majority stake in Gujarat Titans

NEW DELHI, 11 FEB

In a significant development, the Torrent Group, a prominent Indian business conglomerate, is poised to acquire a 67 per cent controlling stake in the former IPL champions, Gujarat Titans, from CVC Capital Partners. This acquisition, which is pending final approval from the IPL governing council, would pave the way for Torrent Group to take over before the new IPL season commencing on March 21.

An IPL source revealed that negotiations for the deal are at an advanced stage, with CVC's lock-in period as sole owners set to conclude in February 2025. Torrent Group, valued at approximately Rs 41,000 crore, had previously shown interest in cricket by participating in the bidding for teams in 2021.

Under the captaincy of Hardik Pandya, the Titans claimed the championship title in 2022 and finished as runners-up in 2023, though they struggled last season, finishing in eighth place. *—PTI*

Sheldon Jackson retires from cricket

Sheldon Jackson. **PHOTO: X**

NEW DELHI, 11 FEB

Prolific Saurashtra batter Sheldon Jackson announced his retirement from professional cricket after a distinguished 15-year career, concluding during a defeat to Gujarat in the Ranji Trophy quarterfinals. The 38-year-old leaves the game with over 7,200 runs from 105 first-class matches, boasting a highest score of 186, alongside 21 centuries and 39 half-centuries, reflecting an impressive average of over 45.

A versatile cricketer, Jackson was known for his reliability as a batsman, excellent fielding abilities, and wicketkeeping in limited-overs formats. He played a key role in Saurashtra's historic Ranji success, breaking into the India A team following a standout performance in the 2012-13 season. His last match saw him score 14 and 27 runs, with Saurashtra being dismissed for 197 in their second innings, losing to Gujarat by an innings and 98 runs.

In a separate development, Gujarat's Priyajit Jadeja and Arzan Nagwaswalla shone with the ball, sharing seven wickets as Saurashtra struggled to build momentum. With Jackson's retirement marking the end of an era for Saurashtra, attention now turns to the next generation of players to fill the void left by this stalwart cricketer. *—PTI*

Plymouth draws City in FA Cup

MANCHESTER, 11 FEB

Plymouth's reward for their stunning FA Cup upset over Liverpool is a fifth-round match against Manchester City. The League Two team, currently languishing at the bottom of their division, shocked Premier League leaders Liverpool with a 1-0 victory on Sunday. They will face Pep Guardiola's City, the four-time defending league champions, at the Etihad Stadium on 1 March.

Holders Manchester United will entertain Fulham in one of three all-Premier League clashes, while Newcastle hosts Brighton and Bournemouth takes on Wolverhampton at home. Aston Villa will face Championship side Cardiff, and Burnley, seeking promotion to the Premier League, travels to Preston.

Crystal Palace secured their place in the next round with a 2-0 win over League Two's Doncaster Rovers, setting up a tie at home against Millwall. Exeter and Nottingham Forest will compete on Tuesday for the opportunity to host Ipswich. *—PTI*

US Open revamps mixed doubles format with $1M prize

NEW YORK, 11 FEB

The US Open is set to relocate its mixed doubles championship to the week prior to the tournament, introducing a new format and a $1 million prize in a bid to attract top singles players to this Grand Slam doubles event. This year's championship will showcase 16 teams competing in shorter matches over two days, during the qualifying rounds for the men's and women's singles.

Executive Director and CEO of the U.S. Tennis Association, Lew Sherr, stated that the goal is to engage more fans and grow the global audience for tennis. The matches will consist of best-of-three sets played to four games, with a match tiebreaker at 10 points if needed. Only the final will resemble a standard Grand Slam format. *—PTI*

15 RACE WALKERS BETTER RECORD

National Games: Sprinter Kujur picks 3rd gold, Jyothi 2nd

DEHRADUN, 11 FEB

Rising sprinter Animesh Kujur and star hurdler Jyothi Yarraji clinched the men's and women's 200m gold medals respectively to pick up their third and second yellow metal of the National Games on a day when 15 race walkers bettered the 26-year-old Games record in an unprecedented feat.

The 21-year-old Kujur, representing Odisha, added the 200m gold to his kitty of 100m and 4x100m relay titles he had won on Saturday and Sunday respectively.

His 200m gold-winning time of 20.58 seconds narrowly fell short of the National Games record of 20.55 seconds set by Amlan Borgohain of Assam in the 2022 edition in Gujarat.

Ragul Kumar G (21.06) and Nithin B (21.07), both from Tamil Nadu, took the silver and bronze respectively.

Jyothi Yarraji clinched women's 200m gold medal in National Games, on Tuesday **PHOTO: PTI**

The 25-year-old Yarraji, representing Andhra Pradesh, won the women's 200m gold with a time of 23.35 seconds to add to the 100m hurdles top prize she had won on Sunday.

- Karnataka's Unnathi Aiyappa (23.70 seconds) and Telangana's Nithya Gandhe (23.76 seconds) took home the silver and bronze medals respectively

Karnataka's Unnathi Aiyappa (23.70 seconds) and Telangana's Nithya Gandhe (23.76 seconds) took home the silver and bronze medals respectively.

A 100m hurdles specialist, Yarraji was the third athlete to clinch a second gold at the National Games. She had won a bronze in the 200m in the 2023 edition in Goa.

Delhi's middle distance runner KM Chanda improved her own Games record in the women's 800m. On her way to gold, Chanda clocked 2:00.82 to better her earlier record of 2:01.58 set in 2022.

Twinkle Chaudhary (2:03.46) and Amandeep Kaur (2:04.76), both from Punjab, pocketed the silver and bronze.

Earlier in the morning session, all the nine competitors who finished the women's 10km race walk bettered the earlier Games record set 26 years ago.

Haryana's Ravina, who had won the National Inter-State and National Open Championships last year in 20km event, clinched the gold with a time 45.52 seconds, bettering the earlier Games record of 51.56 seconds set by Y Bala Devi of Manipur in the 1999 Games in Imphal. *—PTI*

Inter defeats Fiorentina, secures 2nd place in Serie A

MILAN, 11 FEB

Marko Arnautovic netted his first league goal of the season, leading Inter Milan to a 2-1 victory over Fiorentina and propelling them back into second place in Serie A. This win served as a response to Fiorentina's 3-0 triumph in their recent encounter.

In front of over 67,000 fans at the San Siro, Arnautovic scored the decisive goal seven minutes after the break, directing a header into the net. Lautaro Martinez had given Inter the lead in the first half with a header that deflected off Marin Pongracic, which was subsequently ruled an own goal.

Fiorentina equalised just before halftime after a VAR review led to a penalty being awarded for a handball by Matteo Darmian. *—PTI*